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THE
CHANNINGS

THE CHANNINGS

By

Mrs. Henry Wood

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CONTENTS.

I. The Inked Surplice, ... 1
II. Bad News, ... 12
III. Constance Channing, ... 17
IV. No Holiday To-day, ... 25
V. Roland Yorke, ... 32
VI. Lady Augusta Yorke at Home, ... 42
VII. Mr. Ketch, ... 48
VIII. The Assistant-Organist, ... 59
IX. Hamish's Candles, ... 64
X. A False Alarm, ... 74
XI. The Cloister Keys, ... 81
XII. A Mishap to the Bishop of Helstonleigh, ... 91
XIII. Mad Nance, ... 99
XIV. Keeping Office, ... 107
XV. A Splash in the River, ... 115
XVI. Much to Alter, ... 125
XVII. Sunday Morning at Mr. Channing's and at Lady Augusta's, ... 131
XVIII. Mr. Jenkins Alive again, ... 141
XIX. The Loss, ... 149
XX. The Looming of an Awful Fear, ... 156
XXI. Mr. Butterby, ... 165
XXII. An Interrupted Dinner, ... 173
XXIII. An Escort to the Guildhall, ... 181
XXIV. The Examination, ... 186
XXV. A Morning Call, ... 197
XXVI. Checkmated, ... 207

XXVII. A Piece of Preferment, ... 214

XXVIII. An Appeal to the Dean, ... 223

XXIX. A Taste of "Tan," 230

XXX. The Departure, ... 242

XXXI. Abroad, ... 246

XXXII. An Ominous Cough, ... 258

XXXIII. No Seniorship for Tom Channing, ... 264

XXXIV. Gerald Yorke made into a "Block," 273

XXXV. The Earl of Carrick, ... 281

XXXVI. Ellen Huntley, ... 289

XXXVII. The Conspirators, ... 298

XXXVIII. The Decision, ... 307

XXXIX. The Ghost, ... 315

XL. Mr. Ketch's Evening Visit, ... 327

XLI. The Search, ... 333

XLII. An Official Ceremony Interrupted, ... 342

XLIII. Dragging the River, ... 350

XLIV. Mr. Jenkins in a Dilemma, ... 362

XLV. A New Suspicion, ... 367

XLVI. A Letter for Mr. Galloway, ... 375

XLVII. Dark Clouds, ... 384

XLVIII. Muffins for Tea, ... 395

XLIX. A Château en Espagne, ... 402

L. Really gone! 412

LI. An Arrival in a Fly, ... 418

LII. A Relic from the Burial-Ground, ... 428

LIII. The Return Home, ... 436

LIV. "The Ship's Drowned," 445

LV. News from Roland, ... 454

LVI. The Broken Phial, ... 467

LVII. A Ghost again, ... 472

LVIII. Bywater's Dance, ... 483

LIX. Ready, ... 491

LX. In What Does it Lie? 504

THE CHANNINGS.

CHAPTER I.

THE INKED SURPLICE.

THE sweet bells of Helstonleigh Cathedral were ringing out in the summer's afternoon. Groups of people lined the streets, more than the customary business of the day would have brought forth; some pacing with idle steps, some halting to talk with one another, some looking in silence towards a certain point, as far as the eye could reach; all waiting in expectation.

It was the first day of Helstonleigh Assizes—that is, the day on which the courts of law began their sittings. Generally speaking, the commission was opened at Helstonleigh on a Saturday; but for some convenience of the arrangements of the circuit, it was fixed this time for Wednesday; and when those cathedral bells burst forth, they gave the signal that the judges had arrived, and were entering the sheriff's carriage, which had gone out to meet them.

A fine sight, carrying in it much of majesty, was the procession, as it passed through the streets with its slow and stately steps; and although Helstonleigh saw it twice a year, it looked at it with gratified eyes still, and made the day into a sort of holiday. The trumpeters rode first, blowing the proud note of advance, and the long line of well-mounted javelin-men came next, two abreast; their attire being that of the fine livery of the high sheriff's family, and their javelins held in rest. Sundry officials followed, and the governor of the county jail sat in an open carriage, his long white wand raised in the air. Then appeared the beautiful, closed equipage of the sheriff, its four horses, caparisoned with silver, pawing the ground, for they chafed at the slow pace to which they were restrained. In it, in their scarlet robes and flowing wigs, carrying awe to many a young spectator, sat the judges; the high sheriff was opposite to them, and his chaplain by his side, in his gown and bands. A crowd of gentlemen, friends of the sheriff, followed on horseback; and a mob of ragamuffins brought up the rear.

To the assize courts the procession took its way, and there the short business of opening the commission was gone through, when the judges re-entered the carriage to proceed to the cathedral, having been joined by the mayor and corporation. The melodious bells of Helstonleigh were still ringing out, not to welcome the judges to the city now, but as an invitation to them to come and worship God. Inside the grand entrance of the cathedral, waiting to receive the judges, stood the Dean of Helstonleigh, two or three of the chapter, two of the minor canons, and the king's scholars and choristers, all in their white robes. The bells ceased; the fine organ pealed out—and there are few finer organs in England than that of Helstonleigh—the vergers with their silver maces, and the decrepit old bedesmen in their black gowns, led the way to the choir, the long scarlet trains of the judges being held up behind: and places were found for all.

The Reverend John Pye began the service; it was his week for chanting. He was one of the senior minor canons, and the headmaster of the college school. At the desk opposite to him sat the Reverend William Yorke, a young man who had but just gained his minor canonry.

The service went on smoothly until the commencement of the anthem. In one sense it went on smoothly to the end, for no person present, not even the judges themselves, could see that anything was wrong. Mr. Pye was what was called "chanter" to the cathedral, which meant that it was he who had the privilege of selecting the music for the chants and other portions of the service, when the dean did not do so himself. Now, the anthem he had put up for this occasion was a very good one, taken from the Psalms of David. It commenced with a treble solo; it was, moreover, an especial favourite of Mr. Pye's, and he disposed himself complacently to listen.

But no sooner was the symphony over, and the first notes of the chorister had sounded on Mr. Pye's ear, than his face slightly flushed, and he lifted his head with a sharp, quick gesture. *That* was not the voice which ought to have sung this fine anthem; that was a cracked, *passée* voice, which belonged to the senior chorister, a young gentleman of seventeen, who was going out of the choir and the school at Michaelmas. He had done good service for the choir in his day, but his voice was breaking now; and the last time he had attempted a solo, the bishop (who interfered most rarely with the executive of the cathedral; and, indeed, it was not his province to do so) had spoken himself to Mr. Pye on the conclusion of the service, and said the boy ought not to be put to sing alone again.

Mr. Pye bent his head forward to catch a glimpse of the choristers, five of whom sat on his side the choir, the *decani;* five on the opposite, or *cantori* side. So far as he could see, the boy, Stephen Bywater, who ought to have taken the anthem, was not in his place. There appeared to be but four of them; but the senior boy, with his clean, starched-out surplice, partially hid those below him. Mr. Pye wondered where his eyes could have been, not to have noticed the boy's absence when they had all been gathered round the entrance waiting for the judges.

Had Mr. Pye's attention not been fully engrossed with his book as the service had gone on, he might have seen the boy opposite to him; for there sat Bywater, before the bench of king's scholars, and right in front of Mr. Pye. Mr. Pye's glance fell upon him now, and he could scarcely believe it: he rubbed his eyes, and looked, and rubbed again. Bywater there! and without his surplice! braving, as it were, the headmaster! What could he possibly mean by this act of defiant insubordination? Why was he not in his place in the school? Why was he mixing with the congregation? But Mr. Pye could as yet obtain no solution to the mystery.

The anthem came to an end; the dean had bent his brow sternly at the solo, but it did no good; and, the prayers over, the sheriff's chaplain ascended to the pulpit to preach the sermon. He selected his text from St. John's Gospel: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In the course of his sermon he pointed out that the unhappy prisoners in the jail, awaiting the summons to answer before an earthly tribunal for the evil deeds which they had committed, had been led into their present miserable condition by the seductions of the flesh. They had fallen into sin, he went on, by the indulgence of their passions; they had placed no restraint upon their animal appetites and guilty pleasures; they had sunk gradually into crime, and had now to meet the penalty of the law. But did no blame, he asked, attach to those who had remained indifferent to their downward course; who had never stretched forth a friendly hand to rescue them from destruction; who had made no effort to teach and guide in the ways of truth and righteousness these outcasts of society? Were we, he demanded, at liberty to evade our responsibility by asking, in the words of earth's first criminal, "Am I my brother's keeper?" No; it was at once our duty and our privilege to engage in the noble work of man's reformation—to raise the fallen—to seek out the lost, and to restore the outcast; and this, he argued, could only be accomplished by a widely-disseminated knowledge of God's truth, by patient, self-denying labour in God's work, and by a devout dependence on God's Holy Spirit.

At the conclusion of the service the headmaster proceeded to the vestry, where the minor canons, choristers, and lay-clerks kept their surplices. Not the dean and chapter; they robed in the chapter-house: and the king's scholars put on their surplices in the schoolroom. The choristers followed Mr. Pye to the vestry, Bywater entering with them. The boys grouped themselves together: they were expecting—to use their own expression—a row.

"Bywater, what is the meaning of this conduct?" was the master's stern demand.

"I had got no surplice, sir," was Bywater's answer—a saucy-looking boy with a red face, who had a propensity for getting into "rows," and, consequently, punishment.

"No surplice!" repeated Mr. Pye, for the like excuse had never been offered by a college boy before. "What do you mean?"

"We were ordered to wear clean surplices this afternoon, and I brought mine to college this morning, and left it here in the vestry, and took the dirty one home. Well, sir, when I came to put it on this afternoon, it was gone."

"How could it have gone? Nonsense, sir! who would touch your surplice?"

"But I could *not* find it, sir," repeated Bywater, "and the choristers know I couldn't; and they left me hunting for it when they went into the hall to receive the judges.

I could not go into my stall, sir, and sing the anthem without my surplice."

"Hurst had no business to sing it," was the vexed rejoinder of the master. "You know your voice is gone, Hurst. You should have gone up to the organist, told him the case, and had another anthem put up."

"But, sir, I was expecting Bywater in every minute. I thought he'd be sure to find his surplice somewhere," was Hurst's defence. "And when he did not come, and it got too late to do anything, I judged it better to take the anthem myself than to give it to a junior, who would be safe to have made a mull of it. Better for the judges and other strangers to hear a faded voice in Helstonleigh Cathedral than to hear bad singing."

The master did not speak. So far, Hurst's argument had reason.

"And—I beg your pardon for what I am about to say, sir," Hurst went on, "but I hope you will allow me to assure you beforehand that neither I nor my juniors under me have had a hand in this affair. Bywater has just told me that the surplice is found, and how. And blame is sure to be cast to us; but I declare that not one of us has been in the mischief."

Mr. Pye opened his eyes. "What now?" he asked. "What is the mischief?"

"I found the surplice afterwards, sir," Bywater said. "This is it."

He spoke meaningly, as if preparing them for a surprise, and pointed to a corner of the vestry. There lay a clean but tumbled surplice, half soaked in ink. The headmaster and Mr. Yorke, the lay-clerks and choristers, all gathered round, and stared in amazement.

"They shall pay me the worth of the surplice," spoke Bywater, an angry shade crossing his usually good-tempered face.

"And get a double flogging into the bargain," exclaimed the master. "Who has done this?"

"It looks as though it had been rabbled up for the purpose," cried Hurst, in his schoolboy phraseology, bending down and touching it gingerly with his finger. "The ink has been poured on it."

"Where did you find it?" sharply demanded the master, not that he was angry with the boys before him, but he felt angry in his mind that the thing should have taken place.

"I found it behind the screen, sir," replied Bywater. "I thought I'd look there as a last resource, and there it was. I should think nobody has been behind that screen for a twelvemonth past, for it's over the ankles in dust there."

"And you know nothing of it, Hurst?"

"Nothing whatever, sir," was the reply of the senior chorister, spoken earnestly. "When Bywater whispered to me what had occurred, I set it down as the work of one of the choristers, and I taxed them with it. But they all denied it strenuously, and I believe they spoke the truth. I put them on their honour."

The headmaster peered at the choristers. Innocence was in every face—not guilt; and he, with Hurst, believed he must look elsewhere for the culprit. That it had been done by a college boy there could be no doubt whatever, either out of spite to Bywater, or from pure love of mischief. The king's scholars had no business in the vestry; but just at this period the cathedral was undergoing repairs, and they could get in, if so minded, at any time of the day, the doors being left open for the convenience of the workmen.

The master turned out of the vestry. The cathedral was emptied of its crowd, leaving nothing but the dust to tell of what had been, and the bells once more were pealing forth over the city. Mr. Pye crossed the nave, and quitted the cathedral by the cloister door, followed by the choristers. The schoolroom, once the large refectory of the monks in monkish days, was on the opposite side of the cloisters: a large, large room, which you gained by steps, and whose high windows were many feet from the ground. Could you have climbed to those windows, so as to look from them, you would have beheld a fair scene. A clear river wound under the cathedral walls; beyond its green banks were greener meadows, stretching out in the distance; far-famed hills, beautiful to look at, bounding the horizon. Close by were the prebendal houses: some built with red stone, some covered with ivy, all venerable with age; pleasant gardens surrounded most of them, and dark old elms towered aloft, sheltering the rooks, which seemed as old as the trees.

The king's scholars were in the schoolroom, cramming their surplices into bags, or preparing to walk home with them thrown upon their arms, and making enough hubbub to alarm the rooks. It dropped to a dead calm at sight of the master. On holidays—and this was one—it was not usual for the masters to enter the school after service. The school was founded by royal charter—its number limited to forty boys, who were called king's scholars, ten of whom, those whose voices were the best, were chosen choristers. The master marched to his desk, and made a sign for the boys to approach, addressing himself to the senior boy.

"Gaunt, some mischief has been enacted in the vestry, touching Bywater's surplice. Do you know anything of it?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. And Gaunt was one who scorned to tell a lie.

The master ranged his eyes round the circle. "Who does?"

There was no reply. The boys looked at one another, a sort of stolid surprise for the most part predominating. Mr. Pye resumed,—

"Bywater tells me that he left his clean surplice in the vestry this morning. This afternoon it was found, thrown behind the screen, tumbled together, beyond all doubt purposely, and partially covered with ink. I ask, who has done this?"

"I have not, sir," burst forth from most of the boys simultaneously. The seniors, of whom there were three besides Gaunt, remained silent; but this was nothing unusual, for the seniors, unless questioned expressly, or taxed with a fault, did not accustom themselves to a voluntary denial.

"I can only think this has been the result of accident," continued the headmaster; "it is incredible to suppose any one of you would wantonly destroy a surplice. If so, let that boy, whoever it may have been, speak up honourably, and I will forgive him. I conclude that the ink must have been spilt upon it, I say, accidentally, and that he then, in his consternation, tumbled the surplice together, and threw it out of sight behind the screen. It had been more straightforward, more in accordance with what I wish you all to be —boys of thorough truth and honour—had he candidly confessed to it. But the fear of the moment may have scared his good judgment away. Let him acknowledge it now, and I will forgive him; though, of course, he must pay Bywater for another surplice."

A dead silence.

"Do you hear, boys?" the master sternly asked.

No answer from any one; nothing but the continued silence. The master rose, and his countenance assumed its most severe expression.

"Hear further, boys. That it is one of you I am convinced; and your refusing to speak compels me to fear that it was *not* an accident, but a premeditated, wicked act. I now warn you, whoever did it, that if I can discover the author or authors, he or they shall be punished with the utmost severity, short of expulsion, that is allowed by the rules of the school. Seniors, I call upon your aid in this. Look to it."

The master quitted the schoolroom, and Babel broke loose—questioning, denying, protesting, one of another. Bywater was surrounded.

"Won't there be a stunning flogging! Bywater, who did it? Do you know?"

Bywater sat himself astride over the end of a bench and nodded. The senior boy turned to him, some slight surprise in his look and tone.

"Do you know, Bywater?"

"Pretty well, Gaunt. There are two fellows in this school, one's at your desk, one's at the second desk, and I believe they'd either of them do me a nasty turn if they could. It was one of them."

"Who d'ye mean?" asked Gaunt eagerly.

Bywater laughed. "Thank you. If I tell now, it may defeat the ends of justice, as the newspapers say. I'll wait till I am sure—and then let him look to himself. *I* won't spare him, and I don't fancy Pye will."

"You'll never find out if you don't find out at once, Bywater," cried Hurst.

"Shan't I? You'll see," was the significant answer. "It's some distance from here to the vestry of the cathedral, and a fellow could scarcely steal there and steal back without being seen by somebody. It was done stealthily, mark you; and when folks go on stealthy errands, they are safe to be met."

Before he had finished speaking a gentlemanly-looking boy of about twelve, with delicate features, a damask flush on his face, and wavy auburn hair, sprung up with a start. "Why!" he exclaimed, "I saw——" And there he came to a sudden halt, and the flush on his cheek grew deeper, and then faded again. It was a face of exceeding beauty, refined almost as a girl's, and it had gained for him in the school the *sobriquet* of "Miss."

"What's the matter with you, Miss Charley?"

"Oh, nothing, Bywater."

"Charley Channing," exclaimed Gaunt, "do you know who did it?"

"If I did, Gaunt, I should not tell," was the fearless answer.

"*Do* you know it, Charley?" cried Tom Channing, who was one of the seniors of the school.

"Where's the good of asking that wretched little muff?" burst forth Gerald Yorke. "He's only a girl. How do you know it was not one of the lay-clerks, Bywater? They carry ink in their pockets, I'll lay. Or any of the masons might have gone into the vestry, for the matter of that."

"It wasn't a lay-clerk, and it wasn't a mason," stoically nodded Bywater. "It was a college boy. And I shall lay my finger upon him as soon as I'm a little bit surer than I am. I am three parts sure now."

"If Charley Channing does not suspect somebody, I'm not here," exclaimed Hurst, who had closely watched the movement spoken of, and he brought his hand down fiercely on the desk as he spoke. "Come, Miss Channing, just shell out what you know; it's a shame the choristers should lie under the ban: and, of course, we *shall* do so with Pye."

"You be quiet, Hurst, and let Miss Charley alone," drawled Bywater. "I don't want him, or anybody else, to get pummelled to powder; I'll find it out for myself, I say. Won't my old aunt be in a way, though, when she sees the surplice, and finds she has got another to make? I say, Hurst, didn't you croak out that solo! Their lordships in the wigs will be soliciting your photograph as a keepsake."

"I hope they'll set it in diamonds," retorted Hurst.

The boys began to file out, putting on their trenchers as they clattered down the steps. Charley Channing sat himself down in the cloisters on a pile of books, as if willing that the rest should pass out before him. His brother saw him sitting there, and came up to him, speaking in an undertone,—

"Charley, you know the rules of the school: one boy must not tell of another. As Bywater says, you'd get pummelled to powder."

"Look here, Tom. I tell you——"

"Hold your tongue, boy!" sharply cried Tom Channing.

"Do you forget that I am a senior? You heard the master's words. We know no brothers in school life, you must remember."

Charley laughed. "Tom, you think I am a child, I believe. I didn't enter the school yesterday. All I was going to tell you was this: I don't *know*, any more than you, who inked the surplice, and suspicion goes for nothing."

"All right," said Tom Channing, as he flew after the rest; and Charley sat on, and fell into a reverie.

The senior boy of the school, you have heard, was Gaunt. The other three seniors—Tom Channing, Harry Huntley, and Gerald Yorke—possessed a considerable deal of power, but nothing equal to that vested in Gaunt. They had all three entered the school on the same day, and had kept pace with each other as they worked their way up in it, consequently not one could be said to hold the priority; and when Gaunt should quit the school at the following Michaelmas, one of the three would become senior. Which? you may wish to ask. Ah, we don't know that yet.

Charley Channing—a truthful, good boy, full of integrity, kind and loving by nature, and a universal favourite—sat tilted on the books. He was wishing with all his heart that he had not seen something which he had seen that day. He had been going through the cloisters in the afternoon, about the time that all Helstonleigh, college boys included, were in the streets watching for the sheriff's procession, when he saw one of the seniors steal (Bywater had been happy in the epithet) out of the cathedral into the quiet cloisters, peer about him, and then throw a broken ink-bottle over into the graveyard which the cloisters enclosed. The boy stole away without perceiving Charley; and there sat Charley now, trying to persuade himself by some ingenious sophistry—which, however, he knew *was* sophistry—that the senior might not have been the one in the mischief; that the ink-bottle might have been on legitimate duty, and that he threw it from him because it was broken. Charles Channing did not like these unpleasant secrets. There was in the school a code of honour—the boys called it so—that one should not tell of another; and if the headmaster ever went the length of calling the seniors to his aid, those seniors deemed themselves compelled to declare it, if the fault became known to them. Hence Tom Channing's hasty arrest of his brother's words.

"I wonder if I could see the ink-bottle there?" quoth

Charles to himself. Rising from the books, he ran through the cloisters to a certain part, and there, by a dexterous spring, perched himself on to the frame of the open mullioned windows. The gravestones lay pretty thick in the square, enclosed yard, the long, dank grass growing around them ; but there appeared to be no trace of an ink-bottle.

" What on earth are you mounted up there for ? Come down instantly. You know the row there has been about the walls getting defaced."

The speaker was Gerald Yorke, who had come up silently. Openly disobey him young Channing dared not, for the seniors exacted obedience in school and out of it. " I'll get down directly, sir. I am not hurting the wall."

" What are you looking at ? What is there to see ? " demanded Yorke.

" Nothing particular. I was looking for what I can't see," pointedly returned Charley.

" Look here, Miss Channing ; I don't quite understand you to-day. You were excessively mysterious in the school just now over that surplice affair. Who's to know you were not in the mess yourself ? "

" I think you might know it," returned Charley, as he jumped down. " It was more likely to have been you than I."

Yorke laid hold of him, clutching his jacket with a firm grasp. " You insolent ape on two legs ! Now, what do you mean ? You don't stir from here till you tell me."

" I'll tell you, Master Yorke ; I'd rather tell," cried the boy, sinking his voice to a whisper. " I was here when you came peeping out of the college doors this afternoon, and I saw you come up to this niche and fling away an ink-bottle."

Yorke's face flushed scarlet. He was a tall, strong fellow, with a pale complexion, thick, projecting lips, and black hair, promising fair to make a Hercules—but all the Yorkes were finely framed. He gave young Channing a taste of his strength ; the boy, when shaken, was in his hands as a very reed. " You miserable imp ! Do you know who is said to be the father of lies ? "

" Let me alone, sir. It's no lie, and you know it's not. But I promise you, on my honour, that I won't split. I'll keep it in close ; always, if I can. The worst of me is, I bring things out sometimes without thought," he added ingenuously. " I know I do ; but I'll try and keep in this. You needn't be in a passion, Yorke; I couldn't help seeing what I did. It wasn't my fault."

Yorke's face had gone purple with passion. "Charles Channing, if you don't unsay what you have said, I'll beat you to within an inch of your life."

"I can't unsay it," was the answer.

"You can't!" reiterated Yorke, grasping him as a hawk would a pigeon. "How dare you brave me to my presence? Unsay the lie you have told."

"I am in God's presence, Yorke, as well as in yours," cried the boy reverently, "and I dare not tell a lie."

"Then take your whacking! I'll teach you what it is to invent fabrications! I'll put you up for——"

Yorke's tongue and hands stopped. Turning out of the private cloister entrance of the deanery, right upon them, had come Dr. Gardner, one of the prebendaries. He cast a displeased glance at Yorke, not speaking; and little Channing, touching his trencher to the doctor, flew to the place where he had left his books, caught them up, and ran out of the cloisters towards home.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

THE ground near the cathedral, occupied by the deanery and the prebendal residences, was called the "Boundaries." There were a few other houses in it, mostly of a moderate size, inhabited by private families. Across the open gravel promenade, in front of the south cloister entrance, was the house appropriated to the headmaster; and the Channings lived in a smaller one, nearly on the confines of the Boundaries. A portico led into it, and there was a sitting-room on either side the hall. Charley entered, and was going full dash across the hall to a small room where the boys studied, singing at the top of his voice, when the old servant of the family, Judith, an antiquated body, in a snow-white mobcap and check apron, met him, and seized his arm.

"Hush, child! There's ill news in the house."

Charley dropped his voice to an awestruck whisper. "What is it, Judith? Is papa worse?"

"Child! there's illness of mind as well as of body. I didn't say sickness; I said ill news. I don't rightly understand it; the mistress said a word to me, and I guessed the rest. And it was me that took in the letter! *Me!* I wish I'd put it in my kitchen fire first!"

"Is it—Judith, is it news of the—the cause? Is it over?"

"It's over, as I gathered. 'Twas a London letter, and it came by the afternoon post. All the poor master's hopes and dependences for years have been wrested out of him. And if they'd give me my way, I'd prosecute them postmen for bringing such ill-luck to a body's door."

Charles stood something like a statue, the bright, sensitive colour deserting his cheek. One of those causes, Might *versus* Right, of which there are so many in the world, had been pending in the Channing family for years and years. It involved a considerable amount of money, which ought long ago to have devolved peaceably to Mr. Channing; but Might was against him, and Might threw it into Chancery. The decision of the Vice-Chancellor had been given for Mr. Channing, upon which Might, in his overbearing power, carried it to a higher tribunal. Possibly the final decision, from which there could be no appeal, had now come.

"Judith," Charles asked, after a pause, "did you hear whether—whether the letter—I mean the news—had anything to do with the Lord Chancellor?"

"Oh, bother the Lord Chancellor!" was Judith's response. "It had to do with somebody that's an enemy to your poor papa. I know that much. Who's this?"

The hall door had opened, and Judith and Charles turned towards it. A gay, bright-featured young man of three-and-twenty entered, tall and handsome, as it was in the nature of the Channings to be. He was the eldest son of the family, James; or, as he was invariably styled, Hamish. He rose six foot two in his stockings, was well made, and upright. In grace and strength of frame the Yorkes and the Channings stood A1 in Helstonleigh.

"Now, then! What are you two concocting? Is he coming over you again to let him make more toffee, Judy, and burn out the bottom of another saucepan?"

"Hamish, Judy says there's some bad news come in by the London post. I'm afraid the Lord Chancellor has given judgment—given it against us."

The careless smile, the half-mocking expression, left the lips of Hamish. He glanced from Judith to Charles, from Charles to Judith. "Is it sure?" he breathed.

"It's sure that it's awful news of some sort," returned Judith; "and the mistress, she said to me that all was over now. They be all in there but you two," pointing with her finger to the parlour on the left of the hall; "and you had better go in to them. Master Hamish——"

"Well?" returned Hamish in a tone of abstraction.

"You must every one of you just make the best of it, and comfort the poor master. You be young and strong; while he—you know what *he* is. You, in special, Master Hamish, for you're the eldest born, and were the first of 'em as ever I nursed upon my knee."

"Of course, of course," he hastily replied. "But oh, Judith! you don't know the half of the ill this must bring upon us! Come along, Charley; let us hear the worst."

Laying his arm with an affectionate gesture round the boy's neck, Hamish drew him towards the parlour. It was a square, light, cheerful room. Not the best room: that was on the other side the hall. On a sofa, underneath the window, reclined Mr. Channing, his head and shoulders partly raised by cushions. His illness had continued long, and now, it was feared, had become chronic. A remarkably fine specimen of manhood he must have been in his day, his countenance one of thoughtful goodness, pleasant to look upon. Arthur, the second son, had inherited its thoughtfulness, its expression of goodness; James, its beauty; but there was a great likeness between all the four sons. Arthur, but nineteen, was nearly as tall as his brother. He stood bending over the arm of his father's sofa. Tom, looking sadly blank and cross, sat at the table, his elbows leaning on it. Mrs. Channing's pale, sweet face was bent towards her daughter's, Constance, a graceful girl of one-and-twenty; and Annabel, a troublesome young lady of nearly fourteen, was surreptitiously giving twitches to Tom's hair.

Arthur moved from the place next his father when he saw Hamish, as if yielding him the right to stand there. A more united, cordial family it would be impossible to find. The brothers and sisters loved each other dearly, and Hamish they almost reverenced—saving Annabel. Plenty of love the child possessed; but of reverence, little. With his gay good-humour and his indulgent, merry-hearted spirit, Hamish Channing was one to earn love as his right, somewhat thoughtless though he was. Thoroughly well, in the highest sense of the term, had the Channings been reared.

Not of their own wisdom had Mr. and Mrs. Channing trained their children.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Hamish, smoothing his brow, and suffering the hopeful smile to return to his lips. "Judith says some outrageous luck has arrived; come express, by post."

"Joke while you may, Hamish," interposed Mrs. Channing in a low voice; "I shrink from telling it you. Can you not guess the news?"

Hamish looked round at each individually, with his sunny smile, and then let it rest upon his mother. "The very worst I can guess is not so bad. We are all here in our accustomed health. Had we sent Annabel up in that new balloon they are advertising, I might fancy it had capsized with her—as it *will* some day.—Annabel, never you be persuaded to mount the air in that fashion."

"Hamish! Hamish!" gently reproved Mrs. Channing. But perhaps she discerned the motive which actuated him. Annabel clapped her hands. She would have thought it great fun to go up in a balloon.

"Well, mother, the worst tidings that the whole world could bring upon us cannot, I say, be very dreadful, while we can discuss them as we are doing now," said Hamish. "I suppose the Lord Chancellor has pronounced against us?"

"Irrevocably. The suit is for ever at an end, and we have lost it."

"Hamish is right," interrupted Mr. Channing. "When the letter came, I was for a short while overwhelmed. But I begin to see it already in a less desponding light; and by to-morrow, I dare say, I shall be cheerful over it. One blessed thing—children, I say it advisedly, a 'blessed' thing—the worry will be over."

Charley lifted his head. "The worry, papa?"

"Ay, my boy. The agitation—the perpetual excitement—the sickening suspense—the yearning for the end. You cannot understand this, Charley; you can none of you picture it as it has been for me. Could I have got abroad, like other men, it would have shaken itself off amidst the bustle of the world, and have pressed upon me only at odd times and seasons. But here have I lain, that suspense my companion always. It was not right so to allow the anxiety to work upon me: but I could not help it; I really could not."

"We shall manage to do without it, papa," said Arthur.

"Yes; after a bit, we shall manage very well. The worst is, we are backward in our payments; for you know how surely I counted upon it. It ought to have been mine; it was mine by the full right of justice, though it now seems the law was against me. It is a great affliction; but it is one of those which may be borne with an open brow."

"What do you mean, papa?"

"Afflictions are of two kinds—as I class them. The one we bring upon ourselves, through our own misconduct; the other is laid upon us by God for our real advantage. Yes, my boys, we receive many blessings in disguise. Trouble of this sort will only serve to draw out your manly energies, to make you engage vigorously in the business of life, to strengthen your self-dependence and your trust in God. This calamity of the lawsuit we must all meet bravely. One mercy, at any rate, the news has brought with it."

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Channing, lifting her sad face.

"When I have glanced to the possibility of the decision being against me, I have wondered *how* I should pay the long and heavy costs; whether our home must not be broken up to do it, and ourselves turned out upon the world. But the costs are not to fall upon me; all are to be paid out of the estate."

"There's good news!" ejaculated Hamish, his face radiant, as he nodded around.

"My darling boys," resumed Mr. Channing, "you must all work, and do your best. I had thought this money would have made things easier for you; but it is not to be. Not that I would have a boy of mine cherish for a moment the sad and vain dream which some do—that of living in idleness. God has sent us all into the world to work: some with their hands, some with their heads; all according to their station. You will not be the worse off," Mr. Channing added, with a smile, "for working a bit harder than you thought would be necessary."

"Perhaps the money may come to us after all, by some miracle," suggested Charley.

"No," replied Mr. Channing. "It has gone wholly from us. It is as much lost to us as though we had never possessed a claim to it."

It was even so. This decision of the Lord Chancellor had taken it from the Channing family for ever.

"Never mind!" cried Tom, throwing up his trencher, which he had carelessly carried into the room with him. "As papa says, we have our hands and brains: and they often win the race against money in the long run."

Yes. The boys had active hands and healthy brains—no despicable inheritance, when added to a firm faith in God, and an ardent wish to serve Him.

CHAPTER III.

CONSTANCE CHANNING.

How true is the old proverb—"Man proposes and God disposes!" God's ways are not as our ways. His dealings with us are often mysterious, but the eye of Faith can detect His hand in all the varied dispensations of Providence.

It was on this truth that the Channing family reposed when the long-suspended blow fell and swept away their worldly prosperity.

I am not sure that we can quite picture to ourselves the life that had been Mr. Channing's. Of gentle birth, and reared to no profession, the inheritance which ought to have come to him was looked upon as a sufficient independence. That it would come to him had never been doubted by himself or by others; and it was only at the very moment when he thought he was going to take possession of it that some enemy set up a claim and threw it into Chancery. You may cavil at the word "enemy," but it could certainly not be looked upon as the act of a friend. By every right, by every justice, it belonged to James Channing; but he who put in his claim, taking advantage of a quibble of law, was a rich man and a mighty one. I should not like to get possession of another person's money in such manner. I should have the good, old-fashioned, wholesome fear upon me that it would bring no good either to me or mine.

James Channing never supposed but the money would be his some time. Meanwhile he sought and obtained employment to occupy his days, to bring "grist to the mill," until the patrimony should come. Hoping, hoping, hoping on; hoping and disappointment, hoping and disappointment—there was nothing else for years and years; and you know who has said that "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." There have been many such cases in the world, but I question, I say, if we can quite realize them. However, the end was come—the certainty of disappointment; and Mr. Channing was already beginning to be thankful that the suspense, at any rate, was over.

He was the head of an office—or it may be more correct to say, the head of the Helstonleigh branch of it, for the establishment was a London one—a large, important concern, comprising various departments of insurance. Hamish was in the same office; and since Mr. Channing's rheumatism had become chronic, it was Hamish who chiefly transacted the business at the office, generally bringing home the books when he left, and going over them in the evening with Mr. Channing. Thus the business was as effectually transacted, and Mr. Channing retained his salary. The directors were contented that it should be so, for Mr. Channing possessed their thorough respect and esteem.

After the ill news was communicated to them, the boys left the parlour and assembled in a group in the study, at the back, to talk it over. Constance was with them, but they would not admit Annabel. A shady, pleasant, untidy room was that study, opening to a cool, shady garden. It had oil-cloth on the floor instead of carpeting, and books and playthings were strewed about it.

"What an awful shame it is there should be so much injustice in the world!" spoke passionate Tom, flinging his "Euripides" on the table.

"But for one thing, I should be rather glad the worry's over," cried Hamish. "We know the worst now—that we have only ourselves to trust to."

"Our hands and brains, as Tom said," remarked Charley. "What is the 'one thing' that you mean, Hamish?"

Hamish laid hold of Charley by the waist, lifted him up, and let him drop again. "It is what does not concern little boys to know; and I don't see why you should be in here with us, young sir, any more than Annabel."

"A presentiment that this would be the ending has been upon me some time," broke in the gentle voice of Constance. "In my own mind I have kept laying out plans for us all. You see, it is not as if we should enjoy the full income that we have hitherto done."

"What's that, Constance?" asked Tom hotly. "The decision does not touch papa's salary; and you heard him say that the costs were to be paid out of the estate. A pretty thing it would be if any big-wigged Lord Chancellor could take away the money that a man works hard for!"

"Hasty, as usual, Tom," she smiled. "You know—we all know—that, counting fully upon this money, papa is behind in his payments. They must be paid off now in the best way that may be; and it will take so much from his income. It will make no difference to you, Tom: all you can do is to try on heartily for the seniorship and the exhibition."

"Oh, won't it make a difference to me, though!" retorted Tom. "And suppose I don't gain it, Constance?"

"Then you will have to work all the harder, Tom, in some other walk of life. Failing the exhibition, of course there will be no chance of your getting to the university; and you must give up hopes of entering the Church. The worst off—the one upon whom this disappointment must fall the hardest—will be Arthur."

Arthur Channing—astride on the arm of the old-fashioned sofa—lifted his large deep blue eyes to Constance with a flash of intelligence: it seemed to say that she only spoke of what he already knew. He had been silent hitherto. He was of a silent nature—a quiet, loving, tender nature. While the rest spoke, he was content to think.

"Ay, that it will!" exclaimed Hamish. "What will become of your articles now, Arthur?"

It should be explained that Arthur had entered the office of Mr. Galloway, who was a proctor, and also was steward to the dean and chapter. Arthur was only a subordinate in it—a paid clerk, and upon very short pay, too; but it was intended that he should enter upon his articles as soon as this money should be theirs to enable Mr. Channing to pay for them. Hamish might well ask what would become of his articles now.

"I can't see a single step before me," cried Arthur, "save that I must stay on as I am, a paid clerk."

"What rubbish, Arthur!" flashed Tom, who possessed a considerable share of temper when it was touched. "As if you, Arthur Channing, could remain a paid clerk at Galloway's! Why, you'd be on a level with Jenkins—old Jenkins's son. Roland Yorke *would* look down on you then worse than he does now. And that need not be!"

The sensitive crimson dyed the fair, open brow of Arthur. Of all the failings that he found it most difficult to subdue in his own heart, pride bore the greatest share. From the moment the ill news had come to his father, the boy felt that he should have to do fierce battle with his pride; that there was ever-recurring mortification laid up in store for it. "But I *can* battle with it," he bravely whispered to himself, "and I will do it, God helping me."

"I may whistle for my new cricket-bat and stumps now," grumbled Tom.

"And I wonder when I shall get my new clothes?" added Charley.

"How selfish we all are!" broke forth Arthur.

"Selfish?" chafed Tom.

"Yes, selfish. Here we are, croaking over our petty disappointments, and forgetting the worse share that falls upon papa. Failing this money, how will he get to the German baths?"

A pause of consternation. In their own grievances the boys had lost sight of the hope which had recently been shared by them all. An eminent physician, passing through Helstonleigh, had seen Mr. Channing, and given his opinion that if he would visit certain medicinal spas in Germany, health might be restored to him. When the cause should be terminated in their favour, Mr. Channing had intended to set out. But now it was given against him, and hope of setting out was gone.

"I wish I could carry him on my back to Germany, and work to keep him while he stayed there!" impulsively spoke Tom. "Wretchedly selfish we have been, to dwell on our disappointments by the side of papa's. I wish I was older!"

Constance was standing against the window. She was of middle height, thoroughly ladylike and graceful, her features fair and beautiful, and her dark blue eyes and smooth white brow wonderfully like Arthur's. She wore a muslin dress with a delicate pink sprig upon it, the lace of its open sleeves falling on her pretty white hands, which were playing unconsciously with a sprig of jessamine, while she listened to her brothers as each spoke.

"Tom," she interposed, in answer to the last remark, "it is of no use wishing for impossibilities. We must look steadfastly at things as they exist, and see what is the best that can be made of them. All that you and Charles can do is to work well on at your studies—Annabel the same; and it is to be hoped this blow will take some of her flightiness out of her. Hamish and Arthur and I must try and act more actively."

"You!" echoed Arthur. "Why, what can you do, Constance?"

A soft blush rose to her cheeks. "I tell you that I have seemed to anticipate this," she said, "and my mind has busied itself with plans and projects. I shall look out for a situation as daily governess."

A groan of anger burst from Tom. His quick temper and Arthur's pride alike rose up and resented the words. "A daily governess! It's only another name for servant. Fine that would be for Miss Channing!"

Constance laughed. "O Tom, there are worse misfortunes at sea. I would go out wholly, but that papa would not like to spare me, and I must take Annabel for music and other things in an evening. Don't look cross. It is an excellent thought, and I shan't mind it."

"What will mamma say?" asked Tom ironically. "You just ask her!"

"Mamma knows," replied Constance. "Mamma has had her fears about the termination of the lawsuit, like I have. Ah! while you boys were laughing and joking, and pursuing your sports, or your studies of a night, I and mamma would be talking over the shadowed future. I told mamma that if the time and the necessity came for my turning my education and talents to account, I should do it with a willing heart; and mamma, being rather more sensible than her impetuous son Tom, cordially approved."

Tom made a paper bullet and flung it at Constance, his honest eyes half laughing.

"So should I approve," said Hamish. "It is a case, taking into consideration my father's state, in which all of us should help who are able. Of course, were you boys grown up and getting money, Constance *should* be exempt from aiding and abetting; but as it is, it is different. There will be no disgrace in her becoming a governess; and Helstonleigh will never think it. She is a lady always, and so she would be if she were to turn to and wash up dishes. The only doubt is——"

He stopped, and looked hesitatingly at Constance; and, as if penetrating his meaning, her eyes fell before his.

"——Whether Yorke will like it," went on Hamish, as if he had made no halt in his sentence. And the pretty blush in Constance Channing's face deepened to a hot, glowing crimson; and Tom made a whole heap of bullets at once, and showered them on to her.

"So, Hamish—be quiet, Tom!—you may inquire all over Helstonleigh to-morrow whether anybody wants a governess—a well-trained young lady of twenty-one, who can play, and sing, and paint, and speak really good English, and decent French, and has a smattering of German," rattled on Constance, as if to cover her blushes. "I shall ask forty guineas a year. Do you think I shall get it?"

"I think you ought to ask eighty," said Arthur.

"So I would, if I were thirty-one instead of twenty-one," said Constance. "Oh dear! here am I, laughing and joking over it, but it is a serious thing to undertake the instruction of the young. I hope I shall be enabled to do my duty in it. What's that?"

It was a merry, mocking laugh, which came from the outside of the window; and then a head of auburn hair, all wild and entangled, was pushed up, and in burst Annabel, her saucy dark eyes dancing with delight.

"You locked me out, but I have been outside the window and heard it all," cried she, dancing before them in the most provoking manner. "Arthur can only be a paid clerk, and Constance is going to be a governess and get forty guineas a year, and if Tom doesn't gain his exhibition he must turn bellringer to the college, for papa can't pay for him at the university now!"

"What do you deserve, you wicked little picture of deceit?" demanded Hamish. "Do you forget the old story of the listener who lost his ears?"

"I always do listen whenever I can, and I always will," avowed Annabel. "I have warned you so a hundred times over, and I now warn you again. I wish Tom *would* turn bellringer! I'd make him ring a peal that should astonish Helstonleigh the day Constance goes out as governess. Shan't I have a fine time of it! It's lessons for me now, morning, noon, and night—she's always worrying me; but once let us get her back turned, and I shall have whole holiday! She may think I'll do my lessons with her at night, but I won't!"

The boys began to chase her round the table. She was nearly a match for all four—a troublesome, indulged, sunny-hearted child, who delighted in committing faults, that she might have the pleasure of avowing them. She got out into the garden, first knocking over Constance's paint-box, and some of them went after her.

At that moment Mr. Yorke came in. You have seen him once before, in his place in Helstonleigh Cathedral—a tall, slender man, with pale, well-formed features, and an attractive smile. His dark eyes rested on Constance as he entered, and once more the brilliant colour lighted up her face. When prospects should be a little better—that is, when Mr. Yorke should get a sufficient living bestowed upon him—Constance was to become his wife. His stipend from the minor canonry was at present but trifling.

"Judith met me in the hall as I was going into the parlour, and told me I had better come here," he observed. "She said bad news had arrived for Mr. Channing."

"Yes," answered Hamish. "The lawsuit is lost."

"Lost!" echoed Mr. Yorke.

"Irrevocably. We were discussing ways and means amongst ourselves," said Hamish, "for, of course, this changes prospects materially."

"And Constance is going out as a governess, if she can get anybody to take her, and Arthur is to plod on with Joe Jenkins, and Tom means to apply for the post of bell-ringer to the cathedral," interposed the incorrigible Annabel, who had once more darted in, and heard the last words. "Can you recommend Constance to a place, Mr. Yorke?"

He treated the information lightly; he laughed at and with Annabel; but Constance noticed that a flush crossed his brow, and that he quitted the subject.

"Has the inked surplice been found out, Tom—I mean the culprit?"

"Not yet, Mr. Yorke."

"Charles, you can tell me who it was, I hear?"

There was a startled glance for a moment in Charles's eye as he looked up at Mr. Yorke, and an unconscious meaning in his tone.

"Why, do *you* know who it was, sir?"

"Not I," said Mr. Yorke. "I know that whoever it may have been, he deserves a sound flogging, if he did it wilfully."

"Then, sir, why did you suppose I knew?"

"I met Hurst just now, and he stopped me with the news that he was sure Charley Channing could put his hand upon the offender if he chose to do it. It was not yourself, was it, Charley?"

Mr. Yorke laughed as he asked the question. Charley laughed also, but in a constrained manner. Meanwhile the others, to whom the topic had been as Sanscrit, inquired an explanation, which Mr. Yorke gave, so far as his cognizance went.

"What a shame to spoil a surplice! Have you cause to suspect any particular boy, Charley?" demanded Hamish.

"Don't ask him in my presence," interrupted Tom in the same hurried manner that he had used in the cloisters. "I should be compelled in honour to inform the master, and Charley would get his life thrashed out of him by the school."

"Don't you ask me either, Mr. Yorke," said Charles; and the tone of his voice, still unconsciously to himself, bore a strangely serious earnestness.

"Why not?" returned Mr. Yorke. "I am not a senior of the college school, and under obedience to its headmaster."

"If you are all to stop in this room, I and Tom shall never get our lessons done," was all the reply made by Charles, as he drew a chair to the table and opened his exercise-books.

"And I never could afford that," cried Tom, following his example, and looking out the books he required. "It won't do to let Huntley and Yorke get ahead of me."

"Trying for the seniorship as strenuously as ever, Tom?" asked Mr. Yorke.

"Of course I am," replied Tom Channing, lifting his eyes in slight surprise. "And I hope I shall get it."

"Which of the three stands the best chance?"

"Well," said Tom, "it will be about a neck-and-neck race between us. My name stands first on the rolls of the school; therefore, were our merits equal, in strict justice it ought to be given to me. But the master could pass me over if he pleased, and fix upon either of the other two."

"Which of those two stands first on the rolls?"

"Harry Huntley. Yorke is the last. But that does not count for much, you know, Mr. Yorke, as we all entered together. They enrolled us according as our initial letter stood in the alphabet."

"It will turn wholly upon your scholastic merits, then? I hear—but Helstonleigh is famous for its gossip—that in past times it has frequently gone by favour."

"So it has," said Tom Channing, throwing back his head with a whole world of indignation in the action. "Eligible boys have been passed over, and the most incapable dolt set up above them; all because his friends were in a good position, and hand-in-glove with the headmaster. I don't mean Pye, you know: before he came. It's said the last case was so flagrant that it got to the ears of the dean, and he interfered and forbid favour for the future. At any rate, there's an impression running through the school that merits and conduct, taken together, will be allowed fair play."

"Conduct?" echoed Arthur Channing.

Tom nodded. "Conduct is to be brought in this time. One day, when the first desk got into a row with the headmaster, through some mischief we had gone into out of school, he asked us if we were aware that our conduct, as it might be good or ill, might gain or lose us the seniorship. Yorke, who is bold enough, you know, for ten, remarked that that was a new dodge, and the master overheard the words, and said, Yes, he was happy to say there were many new 'dodges' he had seen fit to introduce, which he trusted might tend to make the school different from what it had been. Of course we had the laugh at Yorke; but the master took no more notice. Since then, I assure you, Mr. Yorke, our behaviour has been a pattern for young ladies—mine, and Huntley's, and Yorke's: for we don't care to lose a chance."

Tom Channing nodded sagaciously as he concluded, and they left the room free for him and Charles.

CHAPTER IV.

NO HOLIDAY TO-DAY.

"Now, Constance, that we have a moment alone, what is this about you?" began Mr. Yorke as they stood together in the garden.

"Annabel said the truth—that I do think of going out as daily governess," she replied, bending over a carnation to hide the blush which rose in her cheeks, a very rival to the blushing flower. "It is a great misfortune that has fallen upon us—at least we can only look at it in that light at present—and will, beyond doubt, be productive of some embarrassment. Do you not see, William, that it is incumbent upon us all to endeavour to lighten this embarrassment, those of us who can? I must assume my share."

Mr. Yorke was silent. Constance took it for granted that he was displeased. He was of a very good family, and she supposed he disliked the step she was about to take—that he deemed it would be derogatory to his future wife.

"Have you fully made up your mind?" he at length asked.

"Yes. I have talked it over with mamma—for indeed she and I both seem to have anticipated this—and she thinks with me, that it is what I ought to do. William, how could I reconcile it to my conscience not to help?" she continued. "Think of papa! think of his strait! It appears to be a plain duty thrown in my path."

"By yourself, Constance?"

"Not by myself," she whispered, lifting for a moment her large blue eyes. "O William, William, do not be displeased with me! do not forbid it! It is honourable to work—it is right to do what we can. Strive to see it in the right light."

"Let that carnation alone, Constance; give your attention to me. What if I do forbid it?"

She walked a little forward, quitting the carnation bed, and halted under the shade of the dark cedar tree, her heart and her colour alike fading. Mr. Yorke followed, and stood before her.

"William, I must do my duty. There is no other way open to me, by which I can earn something to help in this time of need, save that of becoming a governess. Many a lady, better born than I, has done it before me."

"A daily governess, I think you said?"

"Papa could not spare me to go out entirely; Annabel could not spare me; and——"

"I would not spare you," he struck in, filling up her pause. "Was that what you were about to say, Constance?"

The rosy hue stole over her face again, and a sweet smile to her lips. "O William, if you will but sanction it! I shall go about it then with the lightest heart!"

He looked at her with an expression she did not understand, and shook his head. Constance thought it a negative shake, and her hopes fell again. "You did not answer my question," said Mr. Yorke. "What if I forbid it?"

"But it seems to be my duty," she urged from between her pale and parted lips.

"Constance, that is no answer."

"Oh, do not, do not! William, do not you throw this temptation in my way—the choosing between yourself and the plain duty that lies before me."

"The temptation, as you call it, must be for a later consideration. Why will you not reply to me? What would be your course if I forbade it?"

"I do not know. But, O William, if you gave me up——"

She could not continue. She turned away to hide her face from Mr. Yorke. He followed, and obtained forcible view of it. It was wet with tears.

"Nay, but I did not mean to carry it so far as to cause you real grief, my dearest," he said in a changed tone. "Though you brought it on yourself," he added, laughing, as he bent his face down.

"How did I bring it on myself?"

"By doubting me. I saw you doubted me at the first, when Annabel spoke of it in the study. Constance, if you, possessed as you are of suitable requirements, refused, from any notion of false pride, to exert them for your family in a time of need, I should say you were little fitted for the wife of one whose whole duty must be to do his Master's work."

"You will sanction the measure, then?" she rejoined, her countenance lighting up.

"How could you doubt me? I wish I could make a home at once to bring you to; but as you must remain in this a little longer, it is only fair that you should contribute to its maintenance. We all have to bend to circumstances. I shall not love my wife the less because she has had the courage to turn her talents to account. What could you be thinking of, child?"

"Forgive me, William," she softly pleaded. "But you looked so grave and were so silent."

Mr. Yorke smiled. "The truth is, Constance, I was turning about in my mind whether I could not help to place you, and pondering the advantages and disadvantages of a situation I know of. Lady Augusta is looking out for a daily governess."

"Is she?" exclaimed Constance. "I wonder—whether—I—should suit her?"

Constance spoke hesitatingly. The thought which had flashed over her own mind was, whether Lady Augusta Yorke could afford to pay her suitable remuneration. Probably the same doubt had made one of the "disadvantages" hinted at by Mr. Yorke.

"I called there yesterday, and interrupted a 'scene' between Lady Augusta and Miss Caroline," he said; "unseemly anger on my lady's part and rebellion on Carry's forming, as usual, its chief features."

"But Lady Augusta is so indulgent to her children!" interrupted Constance.

"Perniciously indulgent, generally; and when the effects break out in insolence and disobedience, then there ensues a scene. If you go there you will witness them occasionally, and I assure you they are not edifying. You must endeavour to train the girls to something better than they have been trained to yet, Constance."

"If I do go."

"I knew how long it would last, Lady Augusta's instructing them herself," resumed Mr. Yorke. "It is not a month since the governess left."

"Why does she wish to take a daily governess instead of one in the house?"

"*Why* Lady Augusta does a thing is scarcely ever to be accounted for, by herself or by anybody else!" replied Mr. Yorke. "Some convenience, or inconvenience, she mentioned to me, about the sleeping arrangements. Shall I ascertain particulars for you, Constance, touching salary and other matters?"

"If you please. Papa is somewhat fastidious, but he could not object to my going there; and its being so very near our own house would be a great point of——"

"Constance," interrupted a voice at this juncture, "is Mr. Yorke there?"

"He is here, mamma," replied Constance, walking forward to Mrs. Channing, Mr. Yorke attending her.

"I thought I heard you enter," she said, as Mr. Yorke took her hand. "Mr. Channing will be pleased to see you, if you will come in and chat with him. The children have told you the tidings. It is a great detriment to their prospects."

"But they seem determined to bear it bravely," he answered in a hearty tone. "You may be proud to have such children, Mrs. Channing."

"Not proud," she softly said—"thankful."

"True. I am obliged to you for correcting me," was the clergyman's ingenuous answer, as he walked with Mrs. Channing across the hall. Constance halted, for Judith came out of the kitchen and spoke in a whisper,—

"And what's the right and the wrong of it, Miss Constance? *Is* the money gone?"

"Gone entirely, Judith. Gone for good."

"For good!" grunted Judith. "I should say for ill. Why do the Queen let there be a Lord Chancellor?"

"It is not the Lord Chancellor's fault, Judith. He only administers the law."

"Why couldn't he just as well have given it *for* your papa as against him?"

"I suppose he considers that the law is on the other side," sighed Constance.

Judith, with a pettish movement, returned to the kitchen; and at that moment Hamish came down the stairs. He had changed his dress, and had a pair of new white gloves in his hand.

"Are you going out to-night, Hamish?"

There was a stress on the word "to-night," and Hamish marked it. "I promised, you know, Constance. And my staying away would do no good; it could not make things better. Fare you well, my pretty sister. Tell mamma I shall be home by eleven."

"It'll be a sad cut down for 'em all," muttered Judith, gazing at Hamish round the kitchen doorpost. "Where he'll find money for his white gloves and things now is beyond my telling, the darling boy! If I could but get to that Lord Chancellor!"

Had you possessed the privilege of living in Helstonleigh at the time of which this story treats—and I can assure you you might live in a less privileged city—it is possible that on the morning following the above events your peaceful slumbers might have been rudely broken by a noise, loud enough to waken the seven sleepers of Ephesus.

Before seven o'clock the whole school, choristers and king's scholars, assembled in the cloisters. But instead of entering the schoolroom for early school, they formed themselves into a dense mass (if you ever saw schoolboys march otherwise, I have not), and, treading on each other's heels, proceeded through the town to the lodgings of the judges, in pursuance of a time-honoured custom. There the head-boy sent in his name to the very chamber of the Lord Chief Justice, who happened this time to have come the Helstonleigh circuit. "Mr. Gaunt, senior of the college school"—craving holiday for himself and the whole fry who had attended him.

"College boys!" cried his lordship, winking and blinking, like other less majestic mortals do when awoke suddenly out of their morning sleep.

"Yes, my lord," replied the servant. "All the school's come up—such a lot of 'em! It's the holiday they are asking for."

"Oh, ah, I recollect," cried his lordship; for it was not the first time he had been to Helstonleigh. "Give one of my cards to the senior boy, Roberts. My compliments to the headmaster, and I beg he will grant the boys a holiday."

Roberts did as he was bid—he also had been to Helstonleigh before with his master—and delivered the card and message to Gaunt. The consequence of which was, the school tore through the streets in triumph, shouting, "Holiday!" to be heard a mile off, and bringing people hot, and in white garments, from their beds to the windows. The least they feared was that the town had taken fire.

Back to the house of the headmaster for the pantomime to be played through. This usually was (for the master, as wise on the subject as they were, would lie that morning in bed) to send the master's servant into his room with the card and the message; upon which the permission for the holiday would come out, and the boys disperse, exercising their legs and lungs. No such luck, however, on this morning. The servant met them at the door, and grinned dreadfully at the lot.

"Won't you catch it, gentlemen! The headmaster's gone into school, and is waiting for you—marking you all late, of course."

"Gone into school!" repeated Gaunt haughtily, resenting the familiarity as well as the information. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I just mean that, sir," was the reply; upon which Gaunt felt uncommonly inclined to knock him down. But the man had a propensity for grinning, and was sure to exercise it on all possible occasions. "There's some row up, and you are not to have holiday. The master said last night I was to call him this morning as usual." At this unexpected reply the boys slunk away to the college schoolroom, their buoyant spirits sunk down to dust and ashes, as may be figuratively said. They could not understand it; they had not the most distant idea what their offence could have been. Gaunt entered, and the rest trooped in after him. The headmaster sat at his desk in stern state; the other masters were in their places.

"What is the meaning of this insubordination?" the master sharply demanded, addressing Gaunt. "You are three-quarters of an hour behind your time."

"We have been up to the judges, as usual, for holiday, sir," replied Gaunt, in a tone of deprecation. "His lordship sends his card and compliments to you, and——"

"Holiday!" interrupted the master. "Holiday!" he repeated with emphasis, as if disbelieving his own ears. "Do you deem that the school deserves it? A pretty senior you must be if you do?"

"What has the school done, sir?" respectfully asked Gaunt.

"Your memory must be conveniently short," chafed the master. "Have you forgotten the inked surplice?"

Gaunt paused. "But that was not the act of the whole school, sir. It was probably the act of only one."

"But so long as that one does not confess, the whole school must bear it," returned the master, looking round on the assembly. "Boys, understand me. It is not for the fault itself—that may have been, as I said yesterday, the result of accident—but it is the concealment of the fault that makes me angry. Will you confess now—he who did it?"

No; the appeal brought forth no further result than the other one had done. The master continued,—

"You may think—I speak now to the guilty boy, and let him take these words to himself—that you were quite alone when you did it, that no eye was watching; but let me remind you that the eye of God was upon you. What you refuse to tell He can bring to light, if it shall so please Him, in His own wonderful way, His own good time. There will be no holiday to-day. Prayers."

The boys fell into their places, and stood with hanging heads, something like rebellion working in every breast. At breakfast-time they were dismissed, and gathered in the cloisters to give vent to their sentiments.

"Isn't it a stunning shame?" cried hot Tom Channing. "The school ought not to suffer for the fault of one boy. The master has no right——"

"The fault lies in the boy, not in the master," interrupted Gaunt. "A sneak! a coward! If he has got a spark of manly honour in him, he'll speak up now."

"As it has come to this, I say Charley Channing should be made to declare what he knows," said one. "He saw it done!"

"Who says he did?" quickly asked Tom Channing.

"Somebody said so, and that he was afraid to tell."

Gaunt lifted his finger and made a sign to Charles. "Now, boy," as the latter obeyed, "you will answer *me*, remember. The master has called the seniors to his aid, and I order you to speak. Did you see this mischief done?"

"No, I did not!" fearlessly replied little Channing.

"If he doesn't know, he suspects," persisted Hurst. "Come, Miss Channing."

"We don't declare things upon suspicion, do we, Mr. Gaunt?" appealed Charles. "I may suspect one; Hurst may suspect another; Bywater said he suspected two; the whole school may be suspicious, one of another. Where's the use of that?"

"It is of no use," decided Gaunt. "You say you did not see the surplice damaged?"

"I did not, upon my word of honour."

"That's enough," said Gaunt. "Depend upon it, the fellow, while he was at it, took precious good precautions against being seen. When he gets found out he had better not come within reach of the seniors; I warn him of that. They might not leave him a head on his shoulders or a tooth in his mouth."

"Suppose it should turn out to have been a senior, Mr. Gaunt?" spoke Bywater.

"Suppose you should turn out to be an everlasting big donkey?" retorted the senior boy.

CHAPTER V.

ROLAND YORKE.

JUST without the Boundaries, in a wide, quiet street called Close Street, was the office of Richard Galloway, Esquire, proctor, and steward to the dean and chapter. Save for this one office the street consisted of private houses, and it was one of the approaches to the cathedral, though not the chief one. Mr. Galloway was a bachelor—a short, stout man, shaped like a butter-cask, with a fat, round face, round, open, gray eyes, that always looked as if their owner were in a state of wonder, and a little, round mouth. But he was a shrewd man and a capable; he was also, in his way, a dandy—dressed scrupulously in the fashion, with delicate shirt fronts and snow-white wristbands; and for the last twenty-five years, at least, had been a mark for all the single ladies of Helstonleigh to set their caps at.

Of beauty Mr. Galloway could boast little ; but of his hair he was moderately vain : a very good head of hair it was, curling naturally. But hair, let it be luxuriant enough to excite the admiration of a whole army of coiffeurs, is, like other things in this sublunary world of ours, subject to change—it will not last for ever ; and Mr. Galloway's, from a fine and glossy brown, turned, as years went on, to sober gray—nay, almost to white. He did not particularly admire the change, but he had to submit to it. Nature is stronger than we are. A friend hinted that it might be "dyed." Mr. Galloway resented the suggestion : anything false was abhorrent to him. When, however, after an illness, his hair began to fall off alarmingly, he thought it no harm to use a certain specific, emanating from one of her Majesty's physicians, extensively set forth and patronized as an undoubted remedy for the falling off of hair. Mr. Galloway used it extensively in his fear, for he had an equal dread both of baldness and wigs. The lotion not only had the desired effect, but it had more : the hair grew on again luxuriantly, and its gray-whiteness turned into the finest flaxen you ever saw—a light, delicate shade of flaxen, exactly like the curls you see upon the heads of blue-eyed wax dolls. This is a fact ; and whether Mr. Galloway liked it or not, he had to put up with it. Many would not be persuaded but what he had used some delicate preparation of dye hitherto unknown to science, and the suspicion vexed Mr. Galloway. Behold him, therefore, with a perfect shower of smooth, fair curls upon his head, like any young beau.

It was in this gentleman's office that Arthur Channing had been placed, with a view to his becoming ultimately a proctor. To article him to Mr. Galloway would take a good round sum of money ; and this had been put off until the termination of the suit, when Mr. Channing had looked forward to being at his ease in regard to pecuniary means. There were two others in the same office : the one was Roland Yorke, who was articled ; the other was Joseph Jenkins, a thin, spare, humble man of nine-and-thirty, who had served Mr. Galloway for nearly twenty years, earning twenty-five shillings per week. He was a son of old Jenkins the bedesman, and his wife kept a small hosiery shop in High Street. Roland Yorke was, of course, not paid. On the contrary, he had paid pretty smartly to Mr. Galloway for the privilege of being initiated into the mysteries pertaining to a proctor. Arthur Channing may be said to have occupied a position in the office midway between the two. He was to *become* on the footing of Roland Yorke; but meanwhile he received a small sum weekly, in remuneration of his services, like Joe Jenkins did. Roland Yorke, in his proud moods, looked down upon him as a paid clerk; Mr. Jenkins looked up to him as a gentleman. It was a somewhat anomalous position; but Arthur had held his own bravely up in it until this blow came, looking forward to the brighter time.

In the years gone by one of the stalls in Helstonleigh Cathedral was held by the Reverend Dr. Yorke; he had also some time filled the office of sub-dean. He had married, imprudently, the daughter of an Irish peer. a pretty, good-tempered girl, who was as fond of extravagance as she was devoid of means to support it. She had not a shilling: it was even said that the bills for her wedding clothes came in afterwards to Dr. Yorke; but people, you know, are given to talk scandal. Want of fortune had been nothing had Lady Augusta but possessed common prudence; but she spent the doctor's money faster than it came in. In the course of years Dr. Yorke died, leaving eight children, and slender means for them. There were six boys and two girls. Lady Augusta went to reside in a cheap and roomy house (somewhat dilapidated) in the Boundaries, close to her old prebendal residence, and scrambled on in her careless, spending fashion, never out of debt. She retained their old barouche, and *would* retain it. and was a great deal too fond of ordering horses from the livery stables and driving out in it. Gifted with good parts and qualities had her children been born; but of training, in the highest sense of the word, she had given them none. George, the eldest, had a commission, and was away with his regiment; Roland, the second, had been designed for the Church, but no persuasion could induce him to be sufficiently attentive to his studies to qualify himself for it: he was therefore placed with Mr. Galloway, and the Church honours were now intended for Gerald. The fourth son, Theodore, was also in the college school, a junior. Next came two girls, Caroline and Fanny; and there were two little boys younger. Haughty, self-willed, but of sufficiently honourable nature, were the Yorkes. If Lady Augusta had but toiled to foster the good and eradicate the evil, they would have grown up to bless her. Good soil was there to work upon, as there was in the Channings; but in the case of the Yorkes, it was allowed to run to waste or to generate weeds; or, in short, to do as it pleased.

A noisy, scrambling, uncomfortable sort of home was that of the Yorkes, the boys sometimes contending one with another, Lady Augusta often quarrelling with all. The home of the Channings was ever redolent of love, calm, and peace. Can you guess where the difference lay?

On the morning when the college boys had gone up to crave holiday of the judges, and had not obtained it—at least not from the headmaster—Arthur Channing proceeded as usual to Mr. Galloway's after breakfast. Seated at a desk, in his place, writing—he seemed to be ever seated there—was Mr. Jenkins. He lifted his head when Arthur entered with a "Good-morning, sir," and then dropped it again over his copying.

"Good-morning," replied Arthur. And at that moment Mr. Galloway, his flaxen curls in full flow upon his head, something like rings, came forth from his private room. "Good-morning, sir," Arthur added, to his master.

Mr. Galloway nodded a reply to the salutation. "Have you seen anything of Yorke?" he asked. "I want that deed that he's about finished as soon as possible."

"He will not be an instant," said Arthur; "I saw him coming up the street."

Roland Yorke bustled in—a dark-looking young man of twenty-one, with large but fine features, and a countenance expressive of indecision.

"Come, Mr. Yorke, you promised to be here early to-day. You know that deed is being waited for."

"So I am early, sir," returned Roland.

"Early! For *you*, perhaps," grunted Mr. Galloway. "Get to it at once."

Roland Yorke unlocked a drawer, collected sundry parchments together, and sat down to his desk. He and Arthur had their places side by side. Mr. Galloway stood at a table and began sorting some papers that were upon it.

"How is Mr. Channing this morning, Arthur?"

"Much as usual, thank you, sir. Certain news which arrived last evening has not tended to cheer him."

"It is true, then?" remarked Mr. Galloway. "I heard a rumour of it."

"Oh, it's true enough," said Arthur. "It is in all the morning papers."

"Well, there never was a more unjust decision!" emphatically spoke Mr. Galloway. "Mark you, I am not reflecting on the Lord Chancellor's judgment. I have always said that there were one or two nasty points in that suit, which the law might get hold of; but I know the whole cause by heart, from beginning to end, and that money was as much your father's as this coat that I have on is mine. Tell him I'll come in one of these fine evenings and abuse the injustice of our laws with him—will you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Arthur.

"What's this row in the college school about a destroyed surplice, and the boys not getting their holiday through it?" resumed Mr. Galloway.

"Oh, are they not savage!" struck in Roland Yorke. "The first thing Tod did, when he came home to breakfast, was to fling over his bowl of coffee, he was in such a passion. Lady Augusta—she got up to breakfast this morning, for a wonder—boxed his ears, and ordered him to drink water; but he went into the kitchen and got a lot of chocolate made for himself."

"What are the particulars? How was it done? I cannot understand it at all," said Mr. Galloway.

"Bywater left his clean surplice yesterday in the vestry, and somebody threw ink over it—half-soaked it in ink, so the choristers told Tom," answered Arthur Channing. "In the afternoon—they had service late, you know, sir, waiting for the judges—Bywater was not in his place to sing the anthem, and Hurst sang it, and it put the master out very much."

"Put him out all the more that he has got nobody to punish for it," laughed Roland Yorke. "Of course Bywater couldn't appear in his stall and sing the anthem if he had no surplice to appear in; and the master couldn't tan him for not doing it. I know this, if it had happened while I was in the college school, I'd just have skinned some of the fellows alive, but what I'd have made them confess"

"Suppose you had skinned the wrong party?" cynically observed Mr. Galloway. "You are too hasty with your tongue, Roland Yorke. My nephew, Mark, ran in just now to tell me of the holiday being denied, and that was the first I had heard of the affair. Mark thinks one of the seniors was in it—not Gaunt."

Arthur Channing and Roland Yorke both looked up with a sharp, quick gesture. Gaunt excepted, the only senior, besides their respective brothers, was Harry Huntley.

"It is not likely, sir," said Arthur.

"A senior do it!" scoffed Roland Yorke. "What a young idiot Mark Galloway must be to think that!"

"Mark does not seem to think much about it on his own account," said Mr. Galloway. "He said Bywater thought so, from some cause or other, and has offered to bet the whole school that it will turn out to be a senior."

"Does he, though!" cried Yorke, looking puzzled. "Bywater's a cautious fellow with his money; he never bets at random. I say, sir, what else did Galloway tell you?"

"That was all," replied Mr. Galloway. And if you wonder at a staid old proctor chattering over this desultory news with his clerks in business hours, it may be explained to you that Mr. Galloway took the greatest possible interest, almost a boyish interest, in the college school. It was where he had been educated himself, where his nephews were being educated; he was on intimate terms with its masters; knew every boy in it to speak to; saw them troop past his house daily on their progress to and fro; watched them in their surplices on a Sunday, during morning and afternoon service; was cognizant of their advancement, their shortcomings, their merits, and their scrapes—in fact, the headmaster could not take a greater interest in the doings of the collegiate school than did Mr. Galloway. Whether of work or whether of gossip, his ears were ever open to listen to its records. Besides, they were not so overburdened with work in that office but what there was ample time for discussing any news that might be agreeable to its master. His work was light; his returns were heavy; his stewardship alone brought him in several hundreds a year.

"The Reverend Mr. Pye seems uncommonly annoyed about it, sir," Mr. Jenkins ventured to put in. To interrupt or take part in any conversation was not usual with him, unless he could communicate little titbits of information touching the passing topic. "You are aware that Mr. Harper, the lay-clerk, lodges at our house, sir. Well, Mr. Pye came round last night, especially to question him about it."

"What could Harper tell?" asked Mr. Galloway.

"He could not tell anything, except that he would answer for the lay-clerks knowing nothing of the transaction. The master said he never supposed the lay-clerks did know anything of it, but he had his reasons for putting the question. He had been to the masons, too, who are repairing the cathedral, and they declared to the master, one and all, that they had not been into the vestry yesterday, or even round to that side of the college where the vestry is situated."

"Why should the master take it up so pertinaciously?" wondered Roland Yorke.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. He was like one in a fever, so excited over it, Harper said."

"Did he talk to you about it, Jenkins?" asked Mr. Galloway.

"I did not see him, sir; it was Harper told me afterwards," was the reply of Mr. Jenkins, as he subsided to his writing again.

Just at this juncture who should come in view of the window but the headmaster himself! He was passing it with a quick step, when out flew Mr. Galloway and caught him by the button. Roland Yorke, who was ever glad of a pretext for idleness, rose from his stool and pushed his nose close upon the nearest pane, to listen to any colloquy that might ensue; but the window being open, he might have heard without quitting his seat.

"I hear the boys have not got a holiday to-day, Pye," began Mr. Galloway.

"No, that they have not," emphatically pronounced the master; "and if they go on as they seem to be going on now, I'll keep them without it for a twelvemonth. I believe the inking of that surplice was a concocted plan, look you, Galloway, to——"

"To what?" asked Mr. Galloway, for the master stopped short.

"Never mind just yet. I have my strong suspicions as to the guilty boy, and I am doing what I can to convert them into proofs. If it be as I suspect now, I shall expel him."

"But what could it have been done for?" debated Mr. Galloway. "There's no point in the thing, that I can see, to ink and damage a surplice. If the boy to whom it belonged had been inked, one might not have wondered so much."

"I'll point him," cried the master, "if I catch hold of the right one."

"Could it have been one of the seniors?" returned the proctor, all his strong interest awakened.

"It was one who ought to have known better," evasively returned the master. "I can't stop to talk now, Galloway. I have an errand to do, and must be back to duty at ten."

He marched off quickly, and Mr. Galloway came indoors again. "Is that the way you get on with your business, Mr. Yorke?"

Yorke clattered to his desk. "I'll get on with it, sir. I was listening to what the master said."

"It does not concern you what he said. It was not one of your brothers who did it, I suppose?"

"No, that it was not," haughtily spoke Roland Yorke, drawing up his head with a proud, fierce gesture.

Mr. Galloway withdrew to his private room, and for a few minutes silence supervened—nothing was to be heard but the scratching of pens. But Roland Yorke, who had a great antipathy to steady work, and as great a love of his own tongue, soon began again.

"I say, Channing, what an awful blow the dropping of that expected money must be for you fellows! I'm blest if I didn't dream of it last night! If it spoilt my rest, what must it have done by yours?"

"Why, how could you have heard of it last night?" exclaimed Arthur in surprise. "I don't think a soul came to our house to hear the news except Mr. Yorke; and you were not likely to see him. It is in everybody's mouth this morning."

"I had it from Hamish. He came to the party at the Knivetts'. Didn't Hamish get taken in!" laughed Roland. "He understood it was quite a ladies' affair, and loomed in dressed up to the nines. and there he found only a bachelor gathering of Dick's. Hamish was disappointed, I think; he fancied he was going to meet Ellen Huntley, and glum enough he looked——"

"He had but just heard the news of the loss," interrupted Arthur. "Enough to make him look glum."

"Rubbish! It wasn't that. He announced to us at once that the money was gone for good and all, and laughed over it, and said there were worse disasters at sea. Knivett said he never saw a fellow carry ill news off with so high a hand. Had he been proclaiming the accession of a fortune instead of the loss of one, he could not have been more carelessly cheerful. Channing, what on earth shall you do about your articles ?"

A question that caused the greatest pain, especially when put by Roland Yorke, and Arthur's sensitive face flushed.

"You'll have to stop as a paid clerk all your life.—Jenkins, you'll get him for your bosom companion, if you look sharp and make friends," cried Roland, laughing loudly.

"No, sir, I don't think Mr. Arthur Channing is likely to become a paid clerk," said Jenkins.

"Not likely to become a paid clerk ! Why, he *is* it. If he is not one, I'd like to know who is.—Channing, you know you are nothing else."

"I may be something else in time," quietly replied Arthur, who knew how to control his rebellious spirit.

"I say, what a rum go it is about that surplice !" exclaimed Roland Yorke, dashing into another topic. "It's not exactly the mischief itself that's rum, but the master seems to be making so much stir and mystery over it ! And then the hint at the seniors ! They must mean Huntley."

"I don't know who they *mean*," said Arthur, "but I am sure Huntley never did it. He is too open, too honourable——"

"And do you pretend to say that Tom Channing and my brother Ger are not honourable ?" fiercely interrupted Roland Yorke.

"There you go, Yorke, jumping to conclusions ! It is not to be credited that any one of the seniors did it ; still less, if they had done it, that they would not acknowledge it. They are all boys of truth and honour, so far as I believe. Huntley, I'm sure, is."

"And of Tom also I conclude you feel sure ?"

"Yes, I do."

"And I am sure of Ger Yorke. So if the master is directing his suspicions to the seniors, he'll get floored. It's odd what can have turned it upon them."

"I don't think the master suspects the seniors," said Arthur. "He called them to his aid."

"You heard what he but now said to Galloway.—Jenkins, there is a knock at the door."

Jenkins went to open it. He came back, and said Mr. Yorke was wanted.

Roland lazily proceeded to the outer passage, and when he saw who was standing there, put himself into a passion.

"What do you mean by presuming to come to me here?" he haughtily asked.

"Well, sir, perhaps you'll tell me where I am to come, so as to get to see you?" civilly replied the applicant, one who bore the appearance of a tradesman. "It seems it's of no use going to your house. If I went ten times a day, I should get the same answer—that you are not at home."

"Just take yourself off," said Roland.

"Not till you pay me, or tell me for certain when you will pay me, and keep your promise. I want my money, sir, and I must have it."

"We want a great many things that we can't get," returned Roland in a provokingly light tone. "I'll pay you as soon as I can, man; you needn't be afraid."

"I'm not exactly afraid," spoke the man. "I suppose if it came to a put-to, Lady Augusta would see that I got the money."

"You hold your tongue about Lady Augusta. What's Lady Augusta to you? Any odds and ends that I may owe have nothing to do with Lady Augusta. Look here, Simms, I'll pay you next week."

"You have said that so many times, Mr. Yorke."

"At any rate, I'll pay you part of it next week, if I can't the whole. I will, upon my honour. There! now you know that I shall keep my word."

Apparently satisfied, the man departed, and Roland lounged into the office again with the same idle movements that he quitted it.

"It was that confounded Simms," grumbled he.—"Jenkins, why did you say I was in?"

"You did not tell me to say the contrary, sir. He came yesterday, but you were out then."

"What does he want?" asked Arthur.

"Wanted me to pay him a trifle I owe; but it's not convenient to do it till next week. What a terrestrial Eden this lower world might be if debt had never been invented!"

"You need not get into debt," said Arthur. "It is not obligatory."

"One *might* build a mud hut outside the town walls, and shut oneself up in it, and eat herbs for dinner, and sleep upon rushes, and turn hermit for good!" retorted Roland. "*You* need not talk about debt, Channing."

"I don't owe much," said Arthur, noting the significance of Yorke's concluding sentence.

"If you don't, somebody else does."

"Who?"

"Ask Hamish."

Arthur went on writing with a sinking heart. There was an undercurrent of fear running within him—had been for some time—that Hamish did owe money on his own private score. But this allusion to it was not pleasant.

"How much do you owe?" went on Roland.

"Oh, a twenty-pound note would pay my debts, and leave me something out of it," said Arthur in a joking tone. The fact was, that he did not owe a shilling to anybody.—"Jenkins, do you know what I am to set about next?" he continued. "I have filled in this lease."

Jenkins was beginning to look amidst some papers at his elbow in answer to the appeal; but at that moment Mr. Galloway entered, and dispatched Arthur to get a cheque cashed at the bank.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY AUGUSTA YORKE AT HOME.

"If you don't put away that trash, Caroline, and go upstairs and practise, I'll make you go! Strewing the table in that manner! Look what a pickle the room is in!"

The words came from Lady Augusta Yorke, a tall, dark woman, with high cheek-bones, and they were spoken at a pitch that might not have been deemed orthodox at court. Miss Caroline Yorke, a young demoiselle, with a "net" that was more frequently off her head than on it, slipshod shoes, and untidy stockings, had placed a quantity of mulberry leaves on the centre table, and a silkworm on each leaf. She leisurely proceeded with her work, bringing forth more silkworms from her paper trays, paying not the least attention to her mother. Lady Augusta advanced, and treated her to a slight tap on the ear, her favourite mode of correcting her children.

"Now, mamma, what's that for?"

"Do you hear me, you disobedient child? I will have this rubbish put away, I say.—Goodness, Martha! don't bring anybody in here," broke off Lady Augusta, as a maid appeared, showing in a visitor.—"Oh, it is you, William! I don't mind you. Come in."

It was the Reverend William Yorke who entered. He was not altogether a favourite of Lady Augusta's. Though but distantly related to her late husband, he yet bore the name of Yorke; and when he came to Helstonleigh (for he was not a native of the place), and became a candidate for a vacant minor canonry, Lady Augusta's pride had taken fire. The minor canons were looked upon by the exclusives of the cathedral as holding an inferior position amidst the clergy, and she resented it that one belonging to her should descend to set up his place among them.

Mr. Yorke shook hands with Lady Augusta, and then turned to regard the leaves and silkworms. "Are you doing that for ornament, Caroline?"

"Ornament!" wrathfully cried Lady Augusta. "She is doing it for waste of time, and to provoke me."

"No, I am not, mamma," denied Miss Caroline. "My poor silkworms never get anything but lettuce leaves. Tod got these for me from the bishop's garden, and I am looking at the silkworms enjoying the change."

"Tod is in hot water," remarked Mr. Yorke. "He was fighting with another boy as I came through the cloisters."

"Then he'll get his clothes torn, as he did the last time he fought!" exclaimed Lady Augusta in consternation. "I think nobody ever had such a set of children as mine!" she peevishly continued. "The boys boisterous as so many wild animals, and the girls enough to drive one crazy, with their idle, disobedient ways. Look at this room, William! encumbered from one end to the other—things thrown out of hand by Caroline and Fanny. As to their lessons, they never open one. These three days I have never ceased telling Caroline to go and practise, and she has not obeyed me yet! I shall go out of my mind with one thing or another—I know I shall! Nice dunces they'll grow up."

"Go and practise now, Caroline," said Mr. Yorke. "I will put your silkworms up for you."

Caroline pouted. "I hate practising."

He laid his hand gently upon her, gazing at her with his dark, pleasant eyes, reproachful then. "But you do not hate obeying your mamma? You must never let it come to that, Caroline."

She suffered him to lead her to the door, and she went docilely enough to the drawing-room, where the piano was, and sat down to it. Oh, for a little better training for those children! Mr. Yorke began placing the silkworms in the trays, and Lady Augusta went on grumbling.

"It is a dreadful fate—to be left a widow with a heap of unruly children, who will not be controlled! I must get a governess for the girls, and then I shall be free from them a few hours in the day. I thought I would try and save the money, and teach them myself; but I might just as well attempt to teach so many little wild Indians! I am not fit for teaching; it is beyond me. Don't you think you could hear of a governess, William? You go about so."

"I have heard of one since I saw you yesterday," he replied. "A young lady whom you know is anxious to take a situation, and I think she might suit."

"Whom I know?" cried Lady Augusta. "Who is it?"

"Miss Channing."

Lady Augusta looked astonished. "Is *she* going out as governess? That comes of the losing of this lawsuit. She has lost no time in the decision."

"When an unpalatable step has to be taken, the sooner it is set about the less will be the cost," remarked Mr. Yorke.

"Unpalatable! You may well say that. This will be the climax, will it not, William?"

"Climax of what?"

"Of all the unpleasantness that has attended your engagement with Miss Channing——"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Augusta," was the interruption of Mr. Yorke. "No unpleasantness whatever has attended my engagement with Miss Channing."

"I think so, for I consider her beneath you, and, therefore, that it is nothing but unpleasant from beginning to end. The Channings are very well, but they are not equal to the Yorkes. You might make this a pretext for the giving her up."

Mr. Yorke laughed. "I think her all the more worthy of me. The only question that is apt to arise within me is, whether I am worthy of her. As we shall never agree upon this point, Lady Augusta, it may not be worth while to discuss it. About the other thing? I believe she would make an admirable governess for Caroline and Fanny if you could obtain her."

"Oh, I dare say she would do *that*. She is a lady, and has been well educated. Would she want a high salary?"

"Forty guineas, to begin with."

Lady Augusta interrupted him with a scream. "I never could give the half of it! I am sure I never could. What with housekeeping expenses, and milliners' bills, and visiting, and the boys dragging money out of me everlastingly, I have nothing scarcely to spare for education."

"Yet it is more essential than the rest. Your income, properly portioned out, would afford——"

Another interrupting scream from Lady Augusta. Her son Theodore—Tod, familiarly—burst into the room, jacketless, his hair a mass of entanglement, blood upon his face, and his shirt-sleeves hanging in shreds. "You rebellious, wicked fright of a boy!" was the salutation of my lady when she could find her breath.

"Oh, it's nothing, mamma. Don't bother," replied Master Tod, waving her off. "I have been going into Pierce senior, and have polished him off with a jolly good licking. He won't get me into a row again, I'll bet."

"What row did he get you into?"

"He's a nasty, sneaking tattler, and he took and told something to Gaunt, and Gaunt put me up for punishment, and I got a caning from old Pye. I vowed I'd pay Pierce out for it, and I have done it, though he is a sight bigger than me."

"What was it about?" inquired Mr. Yorke. "The damaged surplice?"

"Damaged surplice be hanged!" politely retorted the young gentleman, who in gaining the victory appeared to have lost his temper. "It was something concerning our lessons at the third desk, if you must know."

"You might be civil, Tod," said Lady Augusta. "Look at your shirt! Who do you suppose is going to mend that?"

"It can go unmended," responded Master Tod. "I wish it was the fashion to go without clothes, I do! They are always getting torn."

"I wish it was!" heartily responded my lady.

That same evening, in returning to her house from a visit, Constance Channing encountered Mr. Yorke. He turned to walk with her to the door.

"I intended to call this afternoon, Constance, but was prevented," he observed. "I have spoken to Lady Augusta."

"Well?" she answered, with a smile and a blush.

"She would be very glad of *you;* but the difficulty at first appeared to be about the salary. However, I pointed out a few home truths, and she admitted that if the girls were to get an education, she supposed she must pay for it. She will give you forty guineas; but you are to call upon her and settle details. To-morrow, if convenient to you."

Constance clasped her hands. "I am so pleased!" she exclaimed in a low tone.

"So am I," said Mr. Yorke. "I would rather you went to Lady Augusta's than to a stranger's. And do, Constance, try and make those poor girls more like what they ought to be."

"That I shall try, you may be sure, William. Are you not coming in?"

"No," said Mr. Yorke, who had held out his hand on reaching the door. He was pretty constant in his evening visits to the Channings, but he had made an engagement for this one with a brother clergyman.

Constance entered. She looked in the study for her brothers, but only Arthur was there. He was leaning his elbow upon the table in a thoughtful mood.

"Where are they all?" inquired Constance.

"Tom and Charles are gone to the cricket match. I don't think Hamish has come in."

"Why did you not go to cricket also?"

"I don't know," said Arthur. "I did not feel much inclination for cricket this evening."

"You are looking dull, Arthur; but I have some good news for you," Constance said, bending over him with a bright smile. "It is settled about my going out, and I am to have forty guineas. Guess where it is to."

Arthur threw his arm round Constance, and they stood together, looking at the trailing honeysuckle plant just outside the window. "Tell me, darling."

"It is to Lady Augusta's. William has been talking to her, and she would like to have me. Does it not seem lucky to get it so soon?"

"*Lucky*, Constance?"

"Ah, well, you know what I think, Arthur, though I did say 'lucky,'" returned Constance. "I know it is God who is helping us."

Very beautiful, very touching, was the simple trustfulness reposed in God by Constance and Arthur Channing. The good seed had been sown on good ground, and was bringing forth its fruit.

"I was deep in a reverie when you interrupted me, Constance," Arthur resumed. "Something seems to whisper to me that this loss, which we regard as a great misfortune, may turn out for good in the end."

"In the end! It may have come for our good now," said Constance. "Perhaps I wanted my pride lowered," she laughed; "and this has come to do it, and is dispatching me out a meek governess."

"Perhaps we all wanted it," cried Arthur meaningly. "There are other bad habits it may stop besides pride." He was thinking of Hamish and his propensity to spend. "Forty guineas you are to have?"

"Yes," said Constance. "Arthur, do you know a scheme that I have in my head? I have been thinking of it all day."

"What is it? Stay! here is some one coming in. It is Hamish."

Hamish entered with the account-books under his arm, preparatory to going over them with his father. Constance drew him to her.

"Hamish, I have a plan in my head, if we can only carry it out. I am going to tell it you."

"One that will set the river on fire?" cried gay, laughing Hamish.

"If we—you, and I, and Arthur—can but manage to earn enough money, and if we can observe strict economy at home, who knows but we may send papa to the German baths yet!"

A cloud came over Hamish's face, and his smile faded. "I don't see how *that* is to be done."

"But you have not heard of my good luck. I am going to Lady Augusta's, and am to have forty guineas salary. Now, if you and Arthur will help, it may be easy. O Hamish, it would be worth any effort, any struggle. Think how it would be rewarded! Papa restored to health! to freedom from pain!"

A look of positive pain seated itself on the brow of Hamish. "Yes," he sighed, "I wish it could be done."

"But you do not speak hopefully."

"Because, if I must tell you the truth, I do not feel hopefully. I fear we could not do it—at least until things are brighter."

"If we do our very best, we might get great help, Hamish."

"What help?" he asked.

"God's help," she whispered.

Hamish smiled. He had not yet learnt what Constance had. Besides, Hamish was just then in a little trouble on his own account: he knew very well that *his* funds were wanted in another quarter.

"Constance, dear, do not look at me so wistfully. I will try, with all my might and main, to help my father; but I fear I cannot do anything yet. I mean to draw in my expenses," he went on, laughing—"to live like any old screw of a miser, and never squander a halfpenny where a farthing will suffice."

He took his books and went in to Mr. Channing. Constance began training the honeysuckle, her mind busy, and a verse of Holy Writ running through it: "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

"Ay!" she murmured, glancing upwards at the blue evening sky, "our whole, whole trust in patient reliance; and whatsoever is best for us will be ours."

Annabel stole up to Constance, and entwined her arms caressingly round her. Constance turned, and parted the child's hair upon her forehead with a gentle hand.

"Am I to find a little rebel in you, Annabel? Will you not try and make things smooth for me?"

"O Constance, dear!" was the whispered answer, "it was only my fun last night, when I said you should not take me for lessons in an evening. I will study all day by myself, and get my lessons quite ready for you, so as to give you no trouble in the evening. Would you like to hear me my music now?"

Constance bent to kiss her. "No, dear child; there is no necessity for my taking you in an evening until my days shall be occupied at Lady Augusta Yorke's."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. KETCH.

Mrs. Channing sat with her children. Breakfast was over, and she had the Bible open before her. Never since their earliest years of understanding had she failed to assemble them together for the few minutes' reading, morning and evening. Not for too long at once; she knew the value of *not tiring* young children, when she was leading them to feel an interest in sacred things. She would take Hamish, a little fellow of three years old, upon her knee, read to him a short Bible story suitable to his age, and then talk to him. Talk to him in a soft, loving, gentle tone, of God, of Jesus, of heaven, of his duties in this world, of what he must do to attain to everlasting peace in the next. Day by day, step by step, untiringly, unceasingly, had she thus laboured to awaken good in the child's heart, to train it to holiness, to fill it with love of God. As the other children came on in years, she, in like manner, took them. From simple Bible stories to more advanced Bible stories, and thence to the Bible itself, with other books at times and seasons ; a little reading, a little conversation, gospel truths impressed upon them from her earnest lips. Be you very sure that where this great duty of all duties is left unfulfilled by a mother, a child is not brought up as it ought to be. Win your child towards heaven in his early years, and he will not forget it when he is old. It will be as a very shield compassing him about through life. He may wander astray—there is no telling—in the heyday of his hot-blooded youth ; for the world's temptations are as a running fire, scorching all that venture into its heat ; but the good foundation has been laid, and the earnest, incessant prayers have gone up, and he will find his way home again.

Mrs. Channing closed the Bible and spoke as usual. It was all that teaching should be — good lessons as to this world ; loving pictures of that to come. She had contrived to impress them, not with the too popular notion that heaven was a far-off place up in the skies, some vague millions of miles away, and to which we might be millions of years off ; but that it was very near to them ; that God was ever present with them ; and that death, when he came, should be looked upon as a friend, not an enemy. Hamish was three-and-twenty years old now, and he loved those minutes of instruction as he had done when a child. They had borne their fruit for him and for all ; though not, perhaps, in an equal degree.

The reading over, and the conversation over, she gave the book to Constance to put away, and the boys rose and prepared to enter upon their several occupations. It was not the beginning of the day for Tom and Charles, for they had been already to early school.

"Is papa so very much worse to-day, mamma ?" asked Tom.

"I did not say he was worse, Tom," replied Mrs. Channing. "I said he had passed a restless night, and felt tired and weak."

"Thinking over that confounded lawsuit," cried hot, thoughtless Tom.

"Thomas!" reproved Mrs. Channing.

"I beg your pardon, mamma. Unorthodox words are the fashion in the school, and one must catch them. I forget myself when I repeat them before you."

"To repeat them before me is no worse than repeating them behind me, Tom."

Tom laughed. "Very true, mamma. It was not a logical excuse. But I am sure the news, brought to us by the mail on Wednesday night, is enough to put a saint out of temper. Had there been anything unjust in it, had the money not been rightly ours, it would have been different; but to be deprived of what is legally our own——"

"Not legally, as it turns out," struck in Hamish.

"Justly, then," said Tom. "It's too bad; especially as we don't know whatever we shall do without it."

"Tom, you are not to look at the dark side of things," cried Constance in a pretty, wilful, commanding manner. "We shall do very well without it. It remains to be proved whether we shall not do better than with it."

"Children, I wish to say a word to you upon this subject," said Mrs. Channing. "When the news arrived, I was, you know, almost overwhelmed with it, not seeing, as Tom says, whatever we were to do without the money. In the full shock of the disappointment, it wore for me its worse aspect—a far more sombre one than the case really merited. But now that I have had time to see it in its true light, my disappointment has subsided. I consider that we took a completely wrong view of it. Had the decision deprived us of the income we enjoy, then indeed it would have been grievous; but in reality it deprives us of nothing. Not one single privilege that we possessed before does it take from us; not a single expense will it cost us. We looked to this money to do many things with; but its not coming renders us no worse off than we were. It has caused us to get behind-hand with our bills, which we must gradually pay off in the best way we can; it takes from us the power to article Arthur, and it straitens us in many ways, for as you grow up you grow more expensive. This is the extent of the ill, except——"

"O mamma, you forget! The worst ill of all is that papa cannot now go to Germany."

"I was about to say that, Arthur. But other means for his going thither may be found. Understand me, my dears: I do not see any means, or chance of means, at present; you must not fancy that; but it is possible that they may arise with the time of need. One service, at any rate, the decision has rendered me."

"Service?" echoed Tom.

"Yes," smiled Mrs. Channing. "It has proved to me that my children are loving and dutiful. Instead of repining, as some might, they are already seeking how they may make up themselves for the money that has not come. And Constance begins it."

"Don't fear us, mother," cried Hamish, with his sunny smile. "We will be of more use to you yet than the money would have been."

They dispersed—Hamish to his office, Arthur to Mr. Galloway's, Tom and Charles to the cloisters, that famous playplace of the college school. Stolen pleasures, it is said, are sweetest; and just because there had been a stir lately amongst the cathedral clergy, touching the desirability of forbidding the cloisters to the boys for play, so much the more eager were they to frequent them.

As Arthur was going down Close Street, he encountered Mr. Williams, the cathedral organist, striding along with a roll of music in his hand. He was Arthur's music master. When Arthur Channing was in the choir, a college schoolboy, he had displayed considerable taste for music, and it was decided that he should learn the organ. He had continued to take lessons after he left the choir, and did so still.

"I was thinking of coming round to speak to you to-day, Mr. Williams."

"What about?" asked the organist. "Anything pressing?"

"Well, you have heard, of course, that that suit is given against us, so I don't mean to continue the organ. They have said nothing to me at home; but it is of no use spending money that might be saved. But I see you are in too great a hurry to stay to talk now."

"Hurry! I am hurried off my legs," cried the organist. "If a dozen or two of my pupils would give up learning, as you talk of doing, I should only be obliged to them.

I have more work than I can attend to. And now Jupp must go and lay himself up; and I have the services to attend myself, morning and afternoon!"

Mr. Jupp was assistant-organist—an apprentice to Mr. Williams, but just out of his time.

"What ails Jupp?" asked Arthur.

"A little bit of fever, and a great deal of laziness," responded Mr. Williams. "He is the laziest fellow alive. Since his uncle died, and that money came to him, he doesn't care a straw how things go. He was copyist to the cathedral, and he gave that up last week. I have asked Sandon, the lay-clerk, if he will take the copying, but he declines. He is another lazy one."

The organist hurried off. Arthur strove to detain him for another word or two, but it was of no use. So he continued his way to Mr. Galloway's.

Busy enough were his thoughts there. His fingers were occupied with writing, but his mind went roaming without leave. This post of copyist of music to the cathedral, which appeared to be going begging, why should not he undertake it, if Mr. Williams would give it to him? He was competent to do so; and though he very much disliked music-copying, that was nothing: he was not going to set up his dislikes and humour them. He had but a vague idea what might be the remuneration—ten, or twelve, or fifteen pounds a year he fancied it might bring him in. Better that than nothing; it would be a beginning to follow in the wake that Constance had commenced; and he could do it evenings or other odd times. "I won't lose an hour in asking for it," thought Arthur.

At one o'clock, when he was released from the office, he ran through the Boundaries to the cloisters, intending to pass through them on his way to the house of the organist, that being rather a nearer road to it than if he had gone round the town. The sound of the organ, however, struck upon his ear, causing him to assume that it was the organist who was playing. Arthur tried the cathedral door, found it open, and went in.

Mr. Williams it was. He had been trying some new music, and he rose from the organ as Arthur got to the top of the stairs, no very pleasant expression on his countenance.

"What is the matter?" asked Arthur, perceiving that something had put him out.

"I hate ingratitude," responded Mr. Williams.—"Jenkins," called out he to the old bedesman, who had been blowing for him, "you may go to your dinner; I shan't want you any more now."

Old Jenkins hobbled down from the organ-loft, and Mr. Williams continued to Arthur,—

"Would you believe that Jupp has withdrawn himself entirely?"

"From the college?" exclaimed Arthur.

"From the college, and from me. His father comes to me an hour ago, and says he is sure Jupp's in a bad state of health, and he intends to send him to his relatives in the Scotch mountains for some months to try to get him hardy. Not a word of apology for leaving me at a pinch."

"It will be very inconvenient for you," said Arthur. "I suppose that new apprentice of yours is of no use yet for the services?"

"Use!" irascibly retorted Mr. Williams; "he could not play a psalm if it were to save his life. I depended upon Jupp. It was an understood thing that he should stop with me as assistant; had it not been, I should have taken good care to bring somebody on to replace him. As to my attending the services on week-days myself, it's next door to an impossibility. If I do, my teaching business is ruined."

"I wish I was at liberty," said Arthur; "I would take them for you."

"Look here, Channing," said the organist; "since I had this information of old Jupp's, my brain has been worrying itself pretty well, as you may imagine. Now, there's nobody I would rather trust to take the week-day services than you, for you are fully capable, and I have got you into my own style of playing. I never could get Jupp entirely into it; he is too fond of noise and flourishes. It has struck me that perhaps Mr. Galloway might spare you. His office is not overdone with work, and I would make it worth your while."

Arthur, somewhat bewildered at the proposal, sat down on one of the stools, and stared, not answering.

"You will not be offended at my saying that I speak in consequence of your telling me this morning you could not afford to go on with your lessons," resumed the organist. "But for that, I should not have thought of proposing such a thing to you. What capital practice it would be for you, too!"

"The best proof to convince you I am not offended is to tell you what brings me here now," said Arthur in a cordial tone. "I understood you this morning that you were at a loss for some one to undertake the copying of the cathedral music. I came to ask you to give it to me."

"You may have it, and welcome," said Mr. Williams. "That's nothing; I want to know about the services."

"It would take me an hour, morning and afternoon, from the office," debated Arthur. "I wonder whether Mr. Galloway would let me go an hour earlier and stay an hour later to make up for it?"

"You can put the question to him. I dare say he will, especially as he is on terms of friendship with your father. I would give you—let me see," deliberated the organist, falling into a musing attitude—"I would give you twelve pounds a quarter. Say fifty pounds a year, if you stay with me so long. And you should have nothing to do with the choristers; I'd practise them myself."

Arthur's face flushed. It was a great temptation; and the question flashed over his mind whether it would not be well to leave Mr. Galloway's, as his prospects there appeared to be blighted, and embrace this, if that gentleman declined to allow him the requisite hours of absence. Fifty pounds a year! "And," he spoke unconsciously aloud, "there would be the copying besides."

"Oh, that's not much," cried the organist. "That's paid by the sheet."

"I should like it so excessively!" exclaimed Arthur.

"Well, just turn it over in your mind. But you must let me know at once, Channing; by to-morrow at the latest. If you cannot take it, I must find somebody else."

Arthur Channing went out of the cathedral hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels. "Constance said that God would help us," was his grateful thought.

Such a whirlwind of noise. Arthur, when he reached the cloisters, found himself in the midst of the college boys, who were just let out of school. Leaping, shouting, pushing, scuffling, playing, contending! Arthur had not so very long ago been a college boy himself, and enjoyed the fun.

"How are you, old fellows—jolly?"

They gathered around him. Arthur was a favourite with them; had been always, when he was in the school. The elder boys loftily commanded off the juniors, who had to retire to a respectful distance.

"I say, Channing, there's the stunningest go!" began Bywater, dancing a triumphant hornpipe. "You know Jupp? Well, he has been and sent in word to Williams that he is about to die, or something of that, and it's necessary he should go off on the spree to get himself well again. Old Jupp came this morning, just as college was over, and said it; and Williams, he's in the jolliest rage—going to be left without anybody to take the organ. It will just pay him out for being such a tyrant to us choristers."

"Perhaps I am going to take it," returned Arthur.

"You? What a cram!"

"It is not, indeed," said Arthur. "I shall take it if I can get leave from Mr. Galloway. Williams has just asked me."

"Is that true, Arthur?" burst forth Tom Channing, elbowing his way to the front.

"Now, Tom, should I say it were it not true? I only hope Mr. Galloway will throw no difficulty in my way."

"And do you mean to say that you are going to be cock over us choristers?" asked Bywater.

"No, thank you," laughed Arthur. "Mr. Williams will best fill that honour. Bywater, has the mystery of the inked surplice come to light?"

"No, and be shot to it! The master's in a regular way over it though, and——"

"And what do you think?" eagerly interrupted Tod Yorke, whose face was ornamented with several shades of fine colour—blue, green, and yellow—the result of the previous day's pugilistic encounter; "my brother Roland heard the master say he suspected one of the seniors."

Arthur Channing looked inquiringly at Gaunt. The latter tossed his head haughtily. "Roland Yorke must have made some mistake," he observed to Arthur. "It is perfectly out of the question that the master can suspect a senior. I can't imagine where the school could have picked up the notion."

Gaunt was standing with Arthur as he spoke, and the three seniors, Channing, Huntley, and Yorke, happened to be in a line facing them. Arthur regarded them one by one. "You don't look very like committing such a thing as that, any one of you," he laughed. "It is curious where the notion can have come from."

"Such absurdity!" ejaculated Gerald Yorke. "As if it were likely Pye would suspect one of us seniors! It's not believable."

"Not at all believable you would do it," said Arthur. "Had it been the result of accident, of course you would have hastened to declare it, any one of you three."

As Arthur spoke he involuntarily turned his eyes on the sea of faces behind the three seniors, as if searching for signs in some countenance among them by which he might recognize the culprit.

"My goodness!" uttered the senior boy to Arthur. "Had any one of those three done such a thing—accident or no accident—and not declared it, he'd get his name struck off the rolls. A junior may get pardoned for things that a senior cannot."

"Besides, there'd be the losing his chance of the seniorship and of the exhibition," cried one from the throng of boys in the rear.

"How are you progressing for the seniorship?" asked Arthur of the three. "Which of you stands the best chance?"

"I think Channing does," freely spoke up Harry Huntley.

"Why?"

"Because our progress is so equal that I don't think one will get ahead of another, so that the choice cannot be made that way; and Channing's name stands first on the rolls."

"Who is to know if they'll give us fair play and no humbug?" said Tom Channing.

"If they do, it will be what they have never given yet!" exclaimed Stephen Bywater. "Kissing goes by favour."

"Ah, but I heard that the dean——"

At this moment a boy dashed into the throng, scattering it right and left. "Where are your eyes?" he whispered.

Close upon them was the dean. Arm-in-arm with him, in his hat and apron, walked the Bishop of Helstonleigh. The boys stood aside and took off their trenchers. The dean merely raised his hand in response to the salutation—he appeared to be deep in thought; but the bishop nodded freely among them.

"I heard that the dean found fault the last time the exhibition fell, and said favour should never be shown again so long as he was dean of Helstonleigh," said Harry Huntley, when the clergy were beyond hearing, continuing the sentence he had been interrupted in. "I say that, with fair play, it will be Channing's; failing Channing, it will be mine; failing me, it will be Yorke's."

"Now, then," retorted Gerald Yorke, "why should you get the chance before me, pray?"

Huntley laughed. "Only that my name heads yours on the rolls."

Once in three years there fell an exhibition for Helstonleigh College school, to send a boy to Oxford. It would be due the following Easter. Gaunt declined competition for it: he would leave the school at Michaelmas; and it was a pretty generally understood thing that whichever of the three mentioned boys should be appointed senior in his place would be presented with the exhibition. Channing and Yorke most ardently desired to gain it; both of them from the same motive—want of funds at home to take them to the university. If Tom Channing did not gain it, he had made up his mind to pocket pride and go as a servitor. Yorke would not have done such a thing for the world; all the proud Yorke blood would be up in arms at one of their name appearing as a servitor at the Oxford University. No. If Gerald Yorke should lose the exhibition, Lady Augusta must manage to screw out funds to send him. He and Tom Channing were alike designed for the Church. Harry Huntley had no such need. The son of a gentleman of good property, the exhibition was of little moment to him, in a pecuniary point of view; indeed, a doubt had been whispered amongst the boys whether Mr. Huntley would allow Harry to take advantage of it, if he did gain it, he being a liberal-minded and just man. Harry, of course, desired to be the successful one, for fame's sake, just as ardently as did Channing and Yorke.

"I'm bless'd if here isn't that renowned functionary, Jack Ketch!"

The exclamation came from young Galloway. Limping in at one of the cloister doors came the cloister porter, a surly man of sixty, whose temper was not improved by periodical attacks of lumbago. He and the college boys were open enemies. The porter would have rejoiced in denying them the cloisters altogether; and nothing had gladdened his grim old heart like the discussion which was said to have taken place between the dean and chapter regarding the propriety of shutting out the boys and their noise from the cloisters as a playplace. He bore an unfortunate name—Ketch—and the boys, you may be very sure, did not fail to take advantage of it, joining to it sundry embellishments more pointed than polite.

He came up, a ragged gig-whip in his hand, which he was fond of smacking round the throng of boys. He had never gone the length of touching one of them, and perhaps it was just as well for him that he had not.

"Now, you boys, be off with your hullabaloo! Is this a decent noise to make around gentlefolk's doors? You don't know, maybe, as Dr. Burrows is in town."

Dr. Burrows happened to live in a house which had a door opening to the cloisters. The boys retorted. The worst they gave Mr. Ketch was "chaff;" but his temper could bear anything better than that, especially if it was administered by the senior boy.

"Dear me, who's this?" began Gaunt in a tone of ultra politeness. "Boys, do you see this gentleman who condescends to accost us? I really believe it is Sir John Ketch. What's that in his hand?—a piece of rope? Surely, Mr. Ketch, you have not been turning off that unfortunate prisoner who was condemned yesterday? Rather hasty work, sir, was it not?"

Mr. Ketch foamed. "I tell you what it is, sir. You be the senior boy, and instead of restraining these wicked young reptiles, you edges 'em on! Take care, young gent, as I don't complain of you to the dean. Seniors have got hoisted afore now."

"Have they really? Well, you ought to know, Mr. Calcraft. There's the dean just gone out of the cloisters; if you make haste, Calcraft, you'll catch him up. Put your best foot foremost, and ask him if he won't report Mr. Gaunt for punishment."

The porter could have danced with rage; and his whip was smacking ominously. He did not dare advance it too near the circle when the senior boy was present, or, indeed, when any of the elder boys were.

"How's your lumbago, Mr. Ketch?" demanded Stephen Bywater. "I'd advise you to get rid of that before the next time you go on duty; it might be in your way, you know. Never was such a thing heard of as for the chief toppler-off of the three kingdoms to be disabled in his limbs! What *would* you do? I'm afraid you'd be obliged to resign your post and sink into private life."

"Now I just vow to goodness as I'll do all I can to get these cloisters took from you boys," shrieked old Ketch, clasping his hands together. "There's insults as flesh and blood can't stand; and, as sure as I be living, I'll pay you out for it."

He turned tail and hobbled off as he spoke, and the boys raised "three groans for Jack Ketch," and then rushed away by the other entrance to their own dinners. The fact was, the porter had brought the ill-will upon himself through his cross-grained temper. He had no right whatever to interfere between the boys and the cloisters; it was not his place to do so. The king's scholars knew this, and, being spirited king's scholars, as they were, would not stand it.

"Tom," said Arthur Channing, "don't say anything at home about the organ. Wait and see if I get it first. Charley did not hear • he was ordered off with the juniors."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSISTANT-ORGANIST.

THINGS often seem to go by the rule of contrary. Arthur returned to the office at two o'clock brimful of the favour he was going to solicit of Mr. Galloway; but he encountered present disappointment. For the first time for many weeks Mr. Galloway did not make his appearance in the office at all; he was out the whole of the afternoon. Roland Yorke, to whom Arthur imparted the plan, ridiculed it.

"Catch me taking such a task upon myself! If I could play the organ like a Mendelssohn—fit to send the folks into ecstasies—I'd never saddle myself with the worry of doing it morning and afternoon. You'll soon be sick of the bargain, Channing."

"I should never be sick of it if I did it for nothing; I am too fond of music for that. And it will be a very easy way of earning money."

"Not so easy as making your mother stump up," was the reply; and if your refinement turns from the expression, my good reader, I am sorry you should have to read it, but it is what Mr. Roland Yorke *said*. "I had a regular scene with Lady Augusta this morning. It's the most unreasonable thing in the world, you know, Channing, for her to think I can live without money, and so I told her—said I must and would have it, in fact."

"Did you get it?"

"Of course I did. I wanted to pay Simms, and one or two more trifles that were pressing; I was not going to have the fellow here after me again. I wish such a thing as money had never been invented, I do."

"You may as well wish we could live without eating."

"So I do sometimes, when I go home, expecting a good dinner, and there's only some horrid cold stuff upon the table. There never was a worse housekeeper than Lady Augusta. It's my belief our servants must live like fighting cocks; for I am sure the bills are heavy enough, and *we* don't get their benefit."

"What made you so late this afternoon?" asked Arthur.

"I went round to pay Simms, for one thing; and then I called in upon Hamish, and stayed talking with him. Wasn't he in a sea of envy when I told him I had been scoring off that Simms! He wished he could do the same."

"Hamish does not owe anything to Simms!" cried Arthur, with hasty retort.

"Doesn't he?" laughed Roland Yorke. "That's all you know about it. Ask him for yourself."

"If you please, sir," interposed Mr. Jenkins at this juncture, "I shall soon be waiting for that paper. Mr. Galloway directed me to send it off by post."

"Bother the paper!" returned Roland; but, nevertheless, he applied himself to complete it. He was in the habit of discoursing upon private topics before Jenkins without any reserve, regarding him as a perfect nonentity.

When Arthur went home in the evening, he found Mr. Galloway sitting with his father. "Well," cried the proctor, as Arthur entered, "and who has been at the office this afternoon?"

"Nobody particular, sir. Oh yes, there has, though—I forgot. The dean looked in, and wanted to see you."

"What did he want?"

"He did not say, sir. He told Jenkins it would do another time."

Arthur left his father and Mr. Galloway together. He did not broach the subject that was uppermost in his heart. Gifted with rare delicacy of feeling, he would not speak to Mr. Galloway until he could see him alone. To prefer the request in his father's presence might have caused Mr. Galloway more trouble in refusing it.

"I can't think what has happened to Arthur this evening!" exclaimed one of them. "His spirits are up to fever heat. Tell us what it is, Arthur."

Arthur laughed. "I hope they will not get lowered to freezing-point within the next hour, that's all."

When he heard Mr. Galloway leaving, he hastened after him, and overtook him in the Boundaries.

"I wanted to say a few words to you, sir, if you please."

"Say on," said Mr. Galloway. "Why did you not say them indoors?"

"I scarcely know how I shall say them now, sir, for it is a very great favour that I have to ask you, and you may be angry, perhaps, at my thinking you might grant it."

"You want holiday, I suppose?"

"Oh no, sir; nothing of that. I want——"

"Well?" cried Mr. Galloway, surprised at his hesitation; but now that the moment of preferring the request had come, Arthur shrank from doing it.

"Could you allow me, sir—would it make very much difference—to allow me—to come to the office an hour earlier and remain in it an hour later?" stammered Arthur.

"What for?" exclaimed Mr. Galloway, with marked surprise.

"I have had an offer made me, sir, to take the college organ at week-day service. I should very much like to accept it, if it could be managed."

"Why, where's Jupp?" uttered Mr. Galloway.

"Jupp has resigned. He is ill, and is going out for his health. I'll tell you how it all happened, sir," went on Arthur, losing diffidence now that he was fairly launched upon his subject. "Of course this failure of the suit makes a great difference to our prospects at home; it renders it incumbent upon us to do what we can to help——"

"Why does it?" interrupted Mr. Galloway. "It may make a difference to your future ease, but it makes none to your present means."

"There is money wanted in many ways, sir; the favourable termination of the suit was counted upon so certainly. For one thing, it is necessary that my father should try the German baths."

"Of course he must try them," cried Mr. Galloway.

"But it will cost money, sir," deprecated Arthur. "Altogether, we have determined to do what we can. Constance set us the example by engaging to attend as daily governess at Lady Augusta's. She goes on Monday."

"Very commendable of her," observed the proctor, who loved a gossip like any old woman. "I hope she'll not let those two unruly girls worry her to death."

"And I was casting about in my mind this morning what I could do to help, when I met the organist," proceeded Arthur. "He chanced to say that he could find nobody to take the music-copying. Well, sir, I thought it over, and at one o'clock I went to ask him to give it to me. I found him at the organ in a state of vexation. Jupp had resigned his post, and Mr. Williams had nobody to replace him with. The long and the short of it is, sir, that he offered it to me."

"And did you accept it?" crossly responded Mr. Galloway.

"Of course I could not do that, sir, until I had spoken to you. If it were possible that I could make up the two hours to you, I should be very glad to take it."

"And do it for nothing, I suppose?"

"Oh no. He would give me fifty pounds a year. And there would be the copying besides."

"That's a great deal!" cried Mr. Galloway.

"It appears to me to be good pay," replied Arthur. "But he would lose a vast deal more than that if he had to attend the cathedral himself. He said it would ruin his teaching connection."

"Ah! self-interest—two for himself and one for you!" ejaculated the proctor. "What does Mr. Channing say?"

"I have said nothing at home. It was of no use telling them until I had spoken to you. Now that my prospects are gone——"

"What prospects?" interrupted Mr. Galloway.

"My articles to you, sir. Of course there's no chance of them now."

Mr. Galloway grunted. "The ruin that Chancery suits work! Mark you, Arthur Channing, this is such a thing that was never asked a proctor before—leave of absence for two hours in the best part of the day! If I grant it, it will be out of the great friendship I bear your father."

"O sir! I shall never forget the obligation."

"Take care you don't. You must come and work for two hours before breakfast in a morning."

"Willingly—readily!" exclaimed Arthur Channing, his face in a glow. "Then may I really tell Mr. Williams that I can accept it?"

"If I don't say yes, I suppose you'd magnify me into a sullen old bear, as bad as Ketch the porter. You may accept it. Stop!" thundered Mr. Galloway, coming to a dead standstill.

Arthur was startled. "What now, sir?"

"Are you to be the instructor of those random animals the choristers?"

"Oh no; I shall have nothing to do with that."

"Very good. If you *had* taken to them, I should have recommended you to guard against such a specimen of singing as was displayed the other day before the judges."

Arthur laughed, spoke a word of heartfelt thanks, and took his way off-hand to the residence of the organist as light as any bird.

"I have got leave, Mr. Williams; I may take the place!" he exclaimed with scant ceremony, when he found himself in that gentleman's presence, who was at tea with his wife. "Mr. Galloway has authorized me to accept it. How do you do, Mrs. Williams?"

"That's a great weight off my mind, then," cried the organist. "I set that dolt of an apprentice of mine to play the folks out of college this afternoon when service was over, and—of all performances! Six mistakes he made in three bars, and broke down at last. I could have boxed his ears. The dean was standing below when I got down. 'Who was that playing, Mr. Williams?' he demanded. So I told him about Jupp's ill-behaviour in leaving me, and that I had offered the place to you. 'But is Channing fully competent?' cried he—for you know what a fine ear for music the dean has. 'Besides,' he added, 'is he not at Galloway's?' I said we hoped Mr. Galloway would spare him, and that I would answer for his competency. So mind, Channing, you must put on the steam, and not disgrace my guarantee. I don't mean the steam of *noise*, or that you should go through the service with all the stops out."

Arthur laughed in answer to the laugh of Mr. Williams; and declining the invitation to remain and partake of tea, he went out. He was anxious to impart the news at home. A few steps on his road he overtook Hamish.

"Where do you spring from?" exclaimed Hamish, passing his arm within Arthur's.

"From concluding an agreement that will bring me in fifty pounds a year," said Arthur.

"Gammon, Master Arthur!"

"It is *not* gammon, Hamish. It is sober truth."

Hamish turned and looked at him, aroused by something in the tone. "And what are you to do for it?"

"Just pass a couple of hours a day delighting my own ears and heart. Do you remember what Constance said last night? Hamish, it is *wonderful* that this help should so soon have come to me!"

"Stay! Where are you going?" interrupted Hamish, as Arthur was turning into a side street.

"This is the nearest way home."

"I had rather not go that way."

"Why?" exclaimed Arthur in surprise. "Hamish, how you look! What is the matter?"

"Must I tell you? It is for your ear alone, mind. There's a certain tradesman's house down there that I'd rather not pass; he has a habit of coming out and dunning me. Do you remember Mr. Dick Swiveller?"

Hamish laughed gaily. He would have laughed on his road to prison; it was his nature. But Arthur seemed to take a downward leap from his high ropes. "Is it Simms?" he breathed.

"No, it is not Simms. Who has been telling you anything about Simms, Arthur? It is not so very much that I owe Simms. What is this good luck of yours?"

Arthur did not immediately reply. A dark shadow had fallen upon his spirit, like a forerunner of evil.

CHAPTER IX.

HAMISH'S CANDLES.

Old Judith sat in her kitchen. Her hands were clasped upon her knees, and her head was bent in thought. Rare indeed was it to catch Judith indulging in a moment's idleness. She appeared to be holding soliloquy with herself.

"It's the most incomprehensible thing in the world! I have heard of ghosts—and, talking about ghosts, that child was in a tremor last night again, I'm sure he was. Brave little heart! he goes up to bed in the dark on purpose to break himself of the fear. I went in for them shirts missis told me of, and he started like anything, and his face turned white. He hadn't heard me till I was in the room;

I'd got no candle, and 'twas enough to startle him. 'Oh, is it you, Judith?' said he quietly, making believe to be as indifferent as may be. I struck a light, for I couldn't find the shirts, and then I saw his white face. He can't overget the fear; 'twas implanted in him in his babyhood; and I only wish I could get that wicked girl punished as I'd punish her, for it was her work. But about the 'tother? I have heard of ghosts walking—though, thank goodness, I'm not frighted at 'em, like the child is—but for a young man to go upstairs, night after night, pretending to go to rest, and sitting up till morning light, is what I never did hear on. If it was once in a chance way, 'twould be a different thing, but it's always. I'm sure it's pretty nigh a year since I——"

"Why, Judith, you are in a brown study!"

The interruption came from Constance, who had entered the kitchen to give an order. Judith looked up.

"I'm in a peck of trouble, Miss Constance. And the worst is, I don't know whether to tell about it or to keep it in. He'd not like it to get to missis's ears, I know; but then, you see, perhaps I ought to tell her, for his sake."

Constance smiled. "Would you like to tell me instead of mamma? Charley has been at some mischief again among the saucepans? Burnt out more bottoms, perhaps?"

"Not he, the darling!" resentfully rejoined Judith. "The burning out of that one was enough for him. I'm sure he took contrition to himself, like as if it had been made of gold."

"What is it, then?"

"Well," said Judith, looking round, as if fearing the walls would hear, and speaking in a mysterious tone, "it's about Mr. Hamish. I don't know but I *will* tell you, Miss Constance, and it'll be, so far, a weight off my mind. I was just saying to myself that I had heard of ghosts walking, but what Mr. Hamish does every blessed night I never did hear of, in all my born days."

Constance felt a little startled. "What does he do?" she hastily asked.

"You know, Miss Constance, my bedroom's overhead, above the kitchen here, and being built out on the side, I can see the windows at the back of the house from it—like we can see 'em from this kitchen window, for the matter of that, if we put our heads out. About a twelvemonth ago—I'm sure it's not far short of it—I took to notice that the light in Mr. Hamish's chamber wasn't put out so soon as it was in the other rooms. So one night, when I was half crazy with that face-ache—you remember my having it, Miss Constance?—and knew I shouldn't get to sleep if I lay down, I thought I'd just see how long he kept it in. Would you believe, Miss Constance, that at three o'clock in the morning his light was still burning!"

"Well," said Constance, feeling the tale was not half told.

"I thought, What on earth could he be after? I might have feared that he had got into bed and left it alight by mistake, but that I saw his shadow once or twice pass the blind. Well, I didn't say a word to him next day—I thought he might not like it; but my mind wouldn't be easy, and I looked out again, and I found that, night after night, that light was in. Miss Constance, I thought I'd trick him, so I took care to put just about a inch of candle in his bed candlestick, and no more; but, law bless me! when folks is bent on forbidden things, it is not candle-ends that will stop 'em!"

"I suppose you mean that the light burnt still, in spite of your precaution?" said Constance.

"It just did," returned Judith. "He gets into my kitchen and robs my candle-box, I thought to myself. So I counted my candles and marked 'em; and I found I was wrong, for they wasn't touched. But one day, when I was putting his cupboard to rights, I came upon a paper right at the back. Two great big composite candles it had got in it, and another half burnt away. Oh, this is where you keep your store, my young master, is it? I thought. They were them big round things, which seems never to burn to an end—three to the pound."

Constance made no reply. Judith gathered breath, and continued,—

"I took upon myself to speak to him. I told him it wasn't well for anybody's health to sit up at night in that fashion, not counting the danger he ran of setting the house on fire and burning us all to cinders in our beds. He laughed—you know his way, Miss Constance—and said he'd take care of his health and of the house, and I was just to make myself easy and hold my tongue, and that *I* need not be uneasy about fire, for I could open my window and drop into the rain-water barrel, and there I should be safe. But in spite of his joking tone there ran through it a sound of command, and from that hour to this I have never opened my lips about it to nobody living."

"And he burns the light still ?"

"Except Saturday and Sunday nights, it's always alight, longer or shorter. Them two nights he gets into bed respectable, like the rest of the house do. You have noticed, Miss Constance, that the evenings he is not out he'll go up to his chamber by half-past nine or ten ?"

"Frequently," assented Constance. "As soon as the reading is over, he will wish us good-night."

"Well, them nights, when he goes up early, he puts his light out sooner—by twelve, or by half-past, or by one ; but when he spends his evenings out, not getting home until eleven, he'll have it burning till two or three in the morning."

"Whatever can he sit up for ?" involuntarily exclaimed Constance.

"I don't know, unless it is that the work at the office is too heavy for him," said Judith. "He has got his own work to do there, and master's as well."

"It is not at all heavy," said Constance. "There is an additional clerk, you know. It cannot be that."

"It has to do with the office books, for certain," returned Judith. "Why else is he so particular in taking 'em into his room every night ?"

"He takes—them—for safety," spoke Constance in a very hesitating manner, as if not feeling perfectly assured of the grounds for her assertion.

"Maybe," sniffed Judith in disbelief. "It can't be that he sits up to read," she resumed. "Nobody in their senses would do that. Reading may be pleasant to some folks, especially them story books, but sleep is pleasanter. This last two or three blessed nights, since that ill news come to make us miserable, I question if he has gone to bed at all, for his candle has only been put out when daylight come to shame it."

"But, Judith, how do you know all this ?" exclaimed Constance, after a few minutes' reflection. "You surely don't sit up to watch the light ?"

"Pretty fit I should be for my work in the morning if I did ! No, Miss Constance. I moved my bed round to the other corner, so as I could see his window as I lay in it ; and I have got myself into a habit of waking up at all hours and looking. Truth to say, I'm not easy ; for the fire is sooner set alight than put out; and if there's the water-butt for me to drop into, there ain't water-butts for the rest of the house."

"Very true," murmured Constance, speaking as if she were in a deep reverie.

"Nobody knows the worry this has been upon my mind," resumed Judith. "Every night when I have seen his window a-shining, I have said to myself, 'I'll tell my mistress of this when morning comes;' but when the morning has come my resolution has failed me. It might worry her, and anger Mr. Hamish, and do no good after all. If he really has not got time for his books in the day, why, he must do 'em at night, I suppose; it would never do for him to fall off, and let the master's means drop through. What ought to be done, Miss Constance?"

"I really do not know, Judith," replied Constance. "You must let me think about it."

She fell into an unpleasant reverie. The most feasible solution she could come to was the one adopted by Judith—that Hamish passed his nights at the books. If so, how sadly he must idle away his time in the day! Did he give his hours up to nonsense and pleasure? And how could he contrive to hide his shortcomings from Mr. Channing? Constance was not sure whether the books went regularly under the actual inspection of Mr. Channing, or whether Hamish went over them aloud. If only the latter, could the faults be concealed? She knew nothing of book-keeping, and was unable to say. Leaving her to puzzle over the matter, we will return to Hamish himself.

We left him in the last chapter, you may remember, objecting to go down a certain side street which would have cut off a short distance of their road, his excuse to Arthur being that a troublesome creditor of his lived in it. The plea was a true one. Not to make a mystery of it, it may as well be acknowledged that Hamish had contracted some debts, and that he found it difficult to pay them. They were not many, and a moderate sum would have settled them; but that moderate sum Hamish did not possess. Let us give him his due; but that he had fully counted upon a time of wealth being close at hand, it is probable he never would have contracted them. When Hamish erred, it was invariably from thoughtlessness—from carelessness—never from deliberate intention.

Arthur, of course, turned from the objectionable street, and continued his straightforward course. They were frequently impeded ; the streets were always crowded at assize time, and acquaintances perpetually stopped them. Among others they met Roland Yorke.

"Are you coming round to Cator's to-night ?" he asked of Hamish.

"Not I," returned Hamish, with his usual gay laugh. "I am going to draw in my expenses and settle down into a miser."

"Moonshine !" cried Roland.

"Is it moonshine, though ? It is just a little bit of serious fact, Yorke. When lord chancellors turn against us and dash our hopes, we can't go on as though the exchequer had no bottom to it."

"It will cost you nothing to come to Cator's. He is expecting one or two chaps, and he has laid in a prime lot of Manillas."

"Evening visiting costs a great deal, one way or another," returned Hamish, "and I intend to drop most of mine for the present. You need not stare so, Yorke."

"I am staring at you. Drop evening visiting ! Anybody dropping that may look to be in a lunatic asylum in six months."

"What a prospect for me !" laughed Hamish.

"*Will* you come to Cator's ?"

"No, thank you."

"Then you are a muff !" retorted Roland as he went on.

It was dusk when they reached the cathedral.

"I wonder whether the cloisters are still open ?" Arthur exclaimed.

"It will not take a minute to ascertain," said Hamish. "If not, we must go round."

They found the cloisters still unclosed, and passed in. Gloomy and sombre were they at that evening hour. So sombre that, in proceeding along the west quadrangle, the two young men positively started when some dark figure glided from within a niche and stood in their way.

"Whose ghost are you ?" cried Hamish.

A short, covert whistle of surprise answered him. "You here !" cried the figure in a tone of excessive disappointment. "What brings you in the cloisters so late ?"

Hamish dexterously wound him towards what little light was cast from the graveyard, and discerned the features of Hurst. Half a dozen more figures brought themselves out of the niches—Stephen Bywater, young Galloway, Tod Yorke, Harrison, Hall, and Berkeley.

"Let me alone, Mr. Hamish Channing. Hush! Don't make a row."

"What mischief is going on, Hurst?" asked Hamish.

"Well, whatever it may have been, it strikes me you have stopped it," was the reply of Hurst. "I say, wasn't there the Boundaries for you to go through, without coming bothering into the cloisters?"

"I am sorry to have spoiled sport," laughed Hamish; "I should not have liked it done to me when I was a college boy. Let us know what the treason was."

"You won't tell?"

"No; if it is nothing very bad. Honour bright."

"Stop a bit, Hurst," hastily interposed Bywater. "There's no knowing what he may think 'very bad.' Give generals, not particulars. Here the fellow comes, I do believe!"

"It was only a trick we were going to serve old Ketch," whispered Hurst. "Come out quietly; better that he should not hear us, or it may spoil sport for another time. Gently, boys!"

Hurst and the rest stole round the cloisters and out at the south door. Hamish and Arthur followed more leisurely and less silently. Ketch came up.

"Who's this here, a-haunting the cloisters at this time o' night? Who be you, I ask?"

"The cloisters are free until they are closed, Ketch," cried Hamish.

"Nobody haven't got no right to pass through 'em at this hour, except the clergy theirselves," grumbled the porter. "We shall have them boys a-playing in 'em at dark next."

"You should close them earlier if you want to keep them empty," returned Hamish. "Why don't you close them at three in the afternoon?"

The porter growled. He knew that he did not dare to close them before dusk, almost dark, and he knew that Hamish knew it too; and therefore he looked upon the remark as a quiet bit of sarcasm. "I wish the dean 'ud give me leave to shut them boys out of 'em," he exclaimed. "It 'ud be a jovial day for me."

Hamish and Arthur passed out, wishing him good-night. He did not reply to it, but banged the gate on their heels, locked it, and turned to retrace his steps through the cloisters. The college boys, who had hidden themselves from his view, came forward again.

"He has got off scot-free to-night, but perhaps he won't do so to-morrow," cried Bywater.

"Were you going to set upon him ?" asked Arthur.

"We were not going to put a finger upon him ; I give you my word we were not," said Hurst.

"What, then, were you going to do ?"

But the boys would not be caught. "It might stop fun, you know, Mr. Hamish. You might get telling your brother Tom ; and Tom, he might let it out to Gaunt ; and Gaunt might turn crusty, and forbid it. We were going to serve the fellow out, but not to touch him or to hurt him ; and that's enough."

"As you please," said Hamish. "He is a surly old fellow."

"He is an old brute ! He's a dog in a kennel ! He deserves hanging !" burst from the throng of boys.

"What do you think he went and did this afternoon ?" added Hurst to the two Channings. "He sneaked up to the dean with a wretched complaint of us boys which hadn't a word of truth in it ; not a syllable, I assure you. He did it only because Gaunt had put him in a temper at one o'clock. The dean did not listen to him, that's one good thing. How *jolly* he'd have been, just at this moment, if you two had not come up ! Wouldn't he, boys ?"

The boys burst into a laugh : roar upon roar, peal upon peal ; shrieking and holding their sides, till the very Boundaries echoed again. Laughing is infectious, and Hamish and Arthur shrieked out with them, not knowing in the least what it was they were laughing at.

But Arthur was heavy at heart in the midst of it. "Do you owe much money, Hamish ?" he inquired, after they quitted the boys and were walking soberly along under the quiet elm trees.

"More than I can pay, old fellow, just at present," was the answer.

"But is it *much*, Hamish ?"

"No, it is not much, taking it in the abstract. Quite a paltry sum."

Arthur caught at the word "paltry ;" it seemed to dissipate his fears. Had he been alarming himself for nothing ? "Is it ten pounds, Hamish ?"

"Ten pounds!" repeated Hamish in a tone of mockery. "That would be little indeed."

"Is it fifty?"

"I dare say it may be. A pound here and a pound there, and a few pounds yonder—yes, taking it altogether, I expect it would be fifty."

"And how much more?" thought Arthur to himself. "You said it was a paltry sum, Hamish!"

"Well, fifty pounds is not a large sum. Though, of course, we estimate sums, like other things, by comparison. You can understand now why I was not sanguine with regard to Constance's hopeful project of helping my father to get to the German baths. I, the eldest, who ought to be the first to assist in it, am the least likely. I don't know how it was I managed to get into debt," mused Hamish. "It came upon me imperceptibly; it did indeed. I depended so entirely upon that money falling to us, that I grew careless, and would often order things which I was not in need of. Arthur, since that news came, I have felt overwhelmed with worry and botheration."

"I wish you were free!"

"If wishes were horses, we should all get on horseback. How debts grow upon you!" Hamish continued, changing his light tone for a graver one. "Until within the last day or two, when I have thought it necessary to take stock of outstanding claims, I had no idea I owed half so much."

"What shall you do about it?"

"That is more easily asked than answered. My own funds are forestalled for some time to come. And the worst is, that now this suit is known to have terminated against us, people are not so willing to wait as they were before. I have had no end of them after me to-day."

"How shall you contrive to satisfy them?"

"Satisfy them in some way I must."

"But how, I ask, Hamish?"

"Rob some bank or other," replied Hamish in his offhand, joking way.

"Shall you speak to my father?"

"Where's the use?" returned Hamish. "He cannot help me just now; he is straitened enough himself."

"He might help you with advice. His experience is larger than yours, his judgment better. 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety,' you know, Hamish."

"I have made up my mind to say nothing to my father.

If he could assist me, I would disclose all to him; as it is, it would only be inflicting upon him unnecessary pain. Understand, Arthur, what I have said to you is in confidence. You must not speak of it to him."

"Of course not. I should not think of interfering between you and him. I wish I could help you!"

"I wish you could, old fellow. But you need not look so serious."

"How you can be so gay and careless over it I cannot imagine," said Arthur.

Hamish laughed. "If there's only a little patch of sunshine as large as a man's hand, I am sure to see it and trust to it."

"Is there any sunshine in this?"

"A little bit; and I hope it will help me out of it. I am sure I was born with a large share of hope in my composition."

"Show me the bit of sunshine, Hamish."

"I can't do that," was the answer. "I fear it is not so much the actual sunshine that's to be seen yet—only the reflection of it. You could not see it at all, Arthur; but I, as I tell you, am extravagantly hopeful."

The same ever gay tone, the same pleasant smile accompanied the words. And yet, at that moment, instead of walking straightforward into the open space beyond the elm trees, as Arthur did, Hamish withdrew his arm from his brother's and halted under their shade, peering cautiously around. They were then within view of their own door.

"What are you looking at?"

"To make sure that the coast is clear. I heard to-day—Arthur, I know that I shall shock you—that a fellow had taken a writ out against me. I don't want it to get served if I can help it."

Arthur was indeed shocked. "O Hamish!" was all he uttered. But the tone betrayed a strange amount of pain mingled with reproach.

"You must not think ill of me. I declare that I have been led into this scrape blindfold, as may be said. I never dreamt I was getting into it. I am not reckless by nature; and but for the reliant expectation of that money, I should be free now as you are."

Thought upon thought was crowding over Arthur's mind. He did not speak.

"I cannot charge myself with any foolish or unnecessary expenditure," Hamish resumed. "And," he added in a deeper tone, "my worst enemy will not accuse me of rashly incurring debts to gratify my own pleasures. I do not get into mischief. Were I addicted to drinking or to gambling, my debts might have been ten times what they are."

"They are enough, it seems," said Arthur. But he spoke the words in sadness, not in a spirit of reproof.

"Arthur, they may prove of the greatest service in teaching me caution for the future. Perhaps I wanted the lesson. Let me once get out of this hash, and I will take pretty good care not to step into another."

"If you only can get out of it."

"Oh, I shall do it somehow, near fear. Let us go on; there seems to be nobody about."

CHAPTER X.

A FALSE ALARM.

THEY reached home unmolested. Arthur went straight to Mr. Channing, who was lying as usual on his sofa, and bent over him with a smile sweet and hopeful as that of Hamish.

"Father, may I gain fifty pounds a year if I can do it without detriment to my place at Mr. Galloway's?"

"What do you say, my boy?"

"Would you have any objection to my taking the organ at college on week-days? Mr. Williams has offered it to me."

Mr. Channing turned his head and looked at him. He did not comprehend. "You could not take it, Arthur; you could not be absent from the office; and young Jupp takes the organ. What is it that you are talking of?"

Arthur explained in his quiet manner, a glad light shining out of his eyes. Jupp had left the college for good, and Mr. Williams had offered the place to him, and Mr. Galloway had authorized him to accept it. He should only have to go to the office for two hours before breakfast in a morning, to make up for the two lost in the day.

"My brave boy!" exclaimed Mr. Channing, making prisoner of his hand. "I said this untoward loss of the suit might turn out to be a blessing in disguise. And so it will; it is bringing forth the sterling love of my children. You are doing this for me, Arthur."

"Doing it a great deal for myself, papa. You do not know the gratification it will be to me, those two hours' play daily!"

"I understand, my dear; understand it all!"

"Especially as——" Arthur came to a sudden stop.

"Especially as what?" asked Mr. Channing.

"As I had thought of giving up taking lessons," Arthur hastily added, not going deeper into explanations. "I play quite well enough now to cease learning. Mr. Williams said one day that, with practice, I might soon equal him."

"I wonder what those parents do, Arthur, who own ungrateful or rebellious children!" Mr. Channing exclaimed after a pause of thought. "The world is full of trouble, and it is of many kinds, and takes various phases; but if we can but be happy in our children, all other trouble may pass lightly over us, as a summer cloud. I thank God that my children have never brought home to me an hour's care. How merciful He has been to me!"

Arthur's thoughts reverted to Hamish and *his* trouble. He felt thankful, then, that it was hid from Mr. Channing.

"I have already accepted the place, papa. I knew I might count upon your consent."

"Upon my warm approbation. My son, do your best at your task. And," Mr. Channing added, sinking his voice to a whisper, "when the choristers peal out their hymn of praise to God during those sacred services, let *your* heart ascend with it in fervent praise and thanksgiving. Too many go through these services in a matter-of-course spirit, their heart being far away. Do not you."

Hamish at this moment came in, carrying the books. "Are you ready, sir? There's not much to do this evening."

"Ready at any time, Hamish."

Hamish laid the books before him on the table, and sat down. Arthur quitted the room. Mr. Channing liked to be alone with Hamish when the accounts were being gone over.

Mrs. Channing was in the drawing-room, some of the children with her. Arthur entered. "Mrs. Channing," cried he, with mock ceremony, "allow me to introduce you to the assistant-organist of the cathedral."

She smiled, supposing it was some joke. "Very well, sir. He can come in!"

"He is in, ma'am. It is myself."

"Is young Mr. Jupp there?" she asked, for he sometimes came home with Arthur.

"Young Mr. Jupp has disappeared from public life, and I am appointed to his place. It is true."

"Arthur!" she remonstrated.

"Mamma, indeed it is true. Mr. Williams has given me the place, and Mr. Galloway has consented to allow me the time to attend the week-day services; and papa is glad of it, and I hope you will be."

"*I* have known of it since this morning," spoke Tom, with an assumption of easy consequence, while Mrs. Channing was gathering her senses, which had been nearly scared away. "Arthur, I hope Williams intends to pay you."

"Fifty pounds a year. And the copying besides."

"*Is* it true, Arthur?" breathlessly exclaimed Mrs. Channing.

"I have told you that it is, mother mine. Jupp has resigned, and I am assistant-organist."

Annabel danced round him in an ecstasy of delight. Not at his success—success or failure did not much trouble Annabel—but she thought there might be a prospect of some fun in store for herself. "Arthur, you'll let me come into the cathedral and blow for you?"

"You little stupid!" cried Tom. "Much good you could do at blowing! A girl blowing the bellows of the college organ! That's rich! Better let Williams catch you there! She'd actually go, I believe!"

"It is not your business, Tom; it is Arthur's," retorted Annabel, with flushed cheeks. "Mamma, can't you teach Tom to interfere with himself, and not with me?"

"I would rather teach Annabel to be a young lady, and not a tomboy," said Mrs. Channing. "You may as well wish to be allowed to ring the college bells as blow the bellows, child."

"I should like that," said Annabel. "Oh, what fun if the cord went up with me!"

Mrs. Channing turned a reproving glance on her, and resumed her conversation with Arthur. "Why did you not tell me before, my boy? It was too good news to keep to yourself. How long has it been in contemplation?"

"Dear mamma, only to-day. It was but this morning that Jupp resigned."

"Only to-day! It must have been decided very hastily, then, for a measure of that sort."

"Mr. Williams was so put to it that he took care to lose no time. He spoke to me at one o'clock. I had gone to him in the cathedral, asking for the copying, which I heard was going begging, and he broached the other subject on the spur of the moment, as it seemed to me. Nothing could be decided until I had spoken to Mr. Galloway, and that I did after he left here this afternoon. He will allow me to be absent from the office an hour, morning and afternoon, on condition that I attend for two hours before breakfast."

"But, Arthur, you will have a great deal upon your hands."

"Not any too much. It will keep me out of mischief."

"When shall you find time to do the copying ?"

"In an evening, I suppose. I will find plenty of time."

As Hamish had observed, there was little to do at the books that evening, and he soon left the parlour. Constance happened to be in the hall as he crossed it on his way to his bedroom. Judith, who appeared to have been on the watch, came gliding from the half-opened kitchen door, and approached Constance, looking after Hamish as he ascended the stairs.

"Do you see, Miss Constance ?" she whispered. "He is a-carrying the books up with him as usual !"

At this juncture Hamish turned round to speak to his sister. "Constance, I don't want any supper to-night, tell my mother. You can call me when it is time for the reading."

"And he is going to set on at 'em now, and he'll be at 'em till morning light !" continued Judith's whisper. "And he'll drop off into his grave with decline!—'taint in the nature of a young man to do without sleep—and that'll be the ending ; and he'll burn himself up first, and all the house with him."

"I think I will go and speak to him," debated Constance.

"*I* should," advised Judith. "The worst is, if the books must be done, why, they must ; and I don't see that there's any help for it."

But Constance hesitated considerably. She did not at all like to interfere ; it appeared so very much to resemble the work of a spy. Several minutes she deliberated, and then went slowly up the stairs. Knocking at Hamish's door, she turned the handle, and would have entered. It was locked.

"Who's there?" called out Hamish.

"Can I come in for a minute, Hamish? I want to say a word to you."

He did not undo the door immediately. There appeared to be an opening and shutting of his desk-table first—a scuffle, as if things were being put away. When Constance entered, she saw one of the insurance books open on the table, the pen and ink near it; the others were not to be seen. His keys were hanging from the table lock. A conviction flashed over the mind of Constance that Judith was right in supposing the office accounts to be the object that kept him up. "What can he do with his time in the day?" she thought.

"What is it, Constance?"

"Can you let me speak to you, Hamish?"

"If you won't be long. I was just beginning to be busy," he replied, taking out the keys and putting them in his pocket.

"I see you were," she said, glancing at the ledger. "Hamish, you must not be offended with me, or think I interfere unwarrantably. I would not do it but that I am anxious for you. Why is it that you sit up so late at night?"

There was a sudden accession of colour in his face—Constance saw it—but there was a smile as well. "How do you know I do sit up? Has Judy been telling tales?"

"Judy is uneasy about it, and she spoke to me this evening. She has visions of the house being burnt up with everybody in it, and of your injuring your health fatally. I believe she would deem the latter calamity almost more grievous than the former, for you know you were always her favourite. Hamish, is there no danger of either?"

"There is not. I am too cautious for the one to happen, and, I believe, too hardy for the other. Judy is a simpleton," he laughed; "she has got her safety water-butt, and what more can she desire?"

"Hamish, why do you sit up? Have you not time for your work in the day?"

"No; or else I should do it in the day. I do not sit up so as to hurt me. I get, on an average, three hours' night work five days in the week; and if that can damage a strong fellow like me, call me a puny changeling."

"You sit up much longer than that."

"Not frequently. These light days, I sometimes do not sit up half so long; I get up in the morning instead. Constance, you look grave enough for a judge!"

"And you laughing enough to provoke me. Suppose I tell papa of this habit of yours, and get him to forbid it?"

"Then, my dear, you would work irreparable mischief," he replied, becoming grave in his turn. "Were I to be prevented doing as I please in my chamber in this house, I must get a room elsewhere, in which I should be my own master."

"Hamish!"

"You oblige me to say it, Constance. You and Judy must lay your heads together upon some other grievance, for, indeed, for this particular one there is no remedy. She is an old goose, and you are a young one."

"Is it right that we should submit to the risk of being set fire to?"

"My dear, if that is the point, I'll have a fire-escape reared over the front door every night, and pay a couple of watchmen to act as guardians. Constance!" again leaving his tone of mockery, "you know that you may trust me better than that."

"But, Hamish, how do you spend your time in the day that you cannot complete your books then?"

"Oh," drawled Hamish. "ours is the laziest office; gossiping and scandal going on in it from morning till night. In the fatigue induced by that, I am not sure but I take a nap sometimes."

Constance could not tell what to make of him. He was gazing at her with the most perplexing expression of face, looking ready to burst into a laugh.

"One last word, Hamish, for I hear Judith calling to you. Are you obliged to do this night work?"

"I am."

"Then I will say no more, and things must go on as it seems they have hitherto done."

Arthur came running up the stairs, and Hamish met him at the chamber door. Arthur, who appeared strangely agitated, began speaking in a half-whisper, unconscious that his sister was within. She heard every word.

"Judy says some young man wants you, Hamish. I fear it may be the fellow to serve the writ. What on earth is to be done?"

"Did Judy say I was at home?"

"Yes; and has handed him into the study to wait. Did you not hear her calling to you?"

"I can't"—"see him," Hamish was about to say. "Yes; I will see him," he added, after a moment's reflection. "Anything rather than have a disturbance whch might come to my mother's ears; and I suppose, if he could not serve it now, he would watch for me in the morning."

"Shall I go down first, and hear what he has to say?"

"Arthur, boy, it would do no good. I have brought this upon myself, and must battle with it. A Channing cannot turn coward!"

"But he may act with discretion," said Arthur. "I will speak to the man, and if there's no help for it I'll call you."

Down flew Arthur, four stairs at a time. Hamish remained with his body inside his chamber door, and his head out. I conclude he was listening; and in the confusion he had probably totally forgotten Constance. Arthur came bounding up the stairs again, his eyes sparkling.

"A false alarm, Hamish! It's only Martin Pope."

"Martin Pope!" echoed Hamish, considerably relieved, for Martin Pope was an acquaintance of his, and subeditor of one of the Helstonleigh newspapers. "Why could not Judy have opened her mouth?"

He ran down the stairs, the colour which had left his face returning to it. But it did not return to that of Constance; hers had changed to an ashy whiteness. Arthur saw her standing there; saw that she must have heard and comprehended all.

"O Arthur, has it come to this? Is Hamish in *that* depth of debt?"

"Hush! Whatever brought you here, Constance?"

"What writ is it that he fears? Is there indeed one out against him?"

"I don't know much about it. There may be one."

She wrung her hands. "The next thing to a writ is a prison, is it not? If he should be taken, what would become of the office—of papa's place?"

"Do not agitate yourself," he implored. "It can do no good."

"Nothing can do good—nothing, nothing. Oh, what trouble!"

"Constance, in the greatest trouble there is always one refuge."

"Yes," she mentally thought, bursting into tears. "What, but for that shelter, would become of us in our bitter hours of trial?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE CLOISTER KEYS.

It was the twenty-second day of the month, and nearly a week subsequent to the date of the last chapter. Arthur Channing sat in his place at the cathedral organ, playing the psalm for the morning; for the hour was that of divine service.

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious: and His mercy endureth for ever!"

The boy's whole heart went up with the words. *He* gave thanks. Mercies had come upon him—upon his; and that great dread—which was turning his days to gall, his nights to sleeplessness—the arrest of Hamish, had not as yet been attempted. He felt it all as he sat there; and in a softer voice he echoed the melodious song of the choristers below, verse after verse, as each verse rose sweetly on the air, filling the aisles of the old cathedral: how that God delivers those who cry unto Him—those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; those whose hearts fail through heaviness, who fall down and there is none to help them—He brings them out of the darkness, and breaks their bonds in sunder. They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters, who see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep; whose hearts cower at the stormy rising of the waves, and in their agony of distress they cry unto Him to help them; and He hears the cry, and delivers them. He stills the angry waves, and makes the storm a calm, and brings them into the haven where they would be; and then they are glad, because they are at rest.

"O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness: and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men!

"And again, when they are minished, and brought low: through oppression, through any plague or trouble; though He suffer them to be evil intreated through tyrants: and let them wander out of the way in the wilderness; yet helpeth He the poor out of misery, and maketh him households like a flock of sheep.

"Whoso is wise will ponder these things: and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

The refrain died away, the gentle sound of the echo died after it, and silence fell upon the cathedral. It was broken by the voice of the Reverend William Yorke giving out the first lesson—a chapter in Jeremiah.

At the final conclusion of the service Arthur Channing quitted the college. In the cloisters he was overtaken by the choristers, who were hastening back to the schoolroom. At the same moment Ketch, the porter, passed, coming towards them from the south entrance of the cloisters. He touched his hat in his usual ungracious fashion to the dean and Dr. Gardner, who were turning into the chapter-house, carrying their trenchers, and looked the other way as he passed the boys.

Arthur caught hold of Hurst. "Have you 'served out' old Ketch, as you threatened ?" he laughingly asked.

"Hush !" whispered Hurst. "It has not come off yet. We had an idea that an inkling of it had got abroad, so we thought it best to keep quiet for a few nights, lest the Philistines should be on the watch. But the time is fixed now, and I can tell you that it is not a hundred nights off."

With a shower of mysterious nods and winks, Hurst rushed away and bounded up the stairs to the schoolroom. Arthur returned to Mr. Galloway's.

"It's the awfulest shame !" burst forth Tom Channing that day at dinner (and allow me to remark, *en parenthèse*, that, in reading about schoolboys, you must be content to accept their grammar as it comes) ; and he brought the handle of his knife down upon the table in a passion.

"Thomas !" uttered Mr. Channing in amazed reproof.

"Well, papa, and so it is ; and the school's going pretty near mad over it !" returned Tom, turning his crimsoned face upon his father. "Would you believe that I and Huntley are to be passed over in the chance for the seniorship, and Yorke is to have it, without reference to merit ?"

"No, I do not believe it, Tom," quietly replied Mr. Channing. "But even were it true, it is no reason why you should burst out in that unseemly manner. Did you ever know a hot temper do good to its possessor ?"

"I know I am hot-tempered," confessed Tom. "I cannot help it, papa ; it was born with me."

"Many of our failings were born with us, my boy, as I have always understood. But they are to be subdued, not indulged."

"Papa, you must acknowledge that it is a shame if Pye has promised the seniorship to Yorke over my head and

Huntley's," reiterated Tom, who was apt to speak as strongly as he thought. "If he gets the seniorship, the exhibition will follow; that is an understood thing. Would it be just?"

"Why are you saying this? What have you heard?"

"Well, it is a roundabout tale," answered Tom. "But the rumour in the school is this; and if it turns out to be true, Gerald Yorke will about get eaten up alive."

"Is that the rumour, Tom?" said Mrs. Channing.

Tom laughed in spite of his anger. "I had not come to the rumour, mamma. Lady Augusta and Dr. Burrows are great friends, you know; and we hear that they have been salving over Pye——"

"Gently, Tom," put in Mr. Channing.

"Talking over Pye, then," corrected Tom, all impatient to proceed with his story; "and Pye has promised to promote Gerald Yorke to the seniorship. He——"

"Dr. Burrows is gone away again," interrupted Annabel. "I saw him go by to-day in his travelling carriage. Judy says he is gone to his rectory; some of the deanery servants told her so."

"You'll get something, Annabel, if you interrupt in that fashion," cried Tom. "Last Monday Dr. Burrows gave a dinner-party. Pye was there, and Lady Augusta was there, and it was then they got Pye to promise it to Yorke."

"How is it known that they did?" asked Mr. Channing.

"The boys all say it, papa. It was circulating through the school this morning like wild-fire."

"You will never take the prize for logic, Tom. *How* did the boys hear it, I ask?"

"Through Mr. Calcraft," replied Tom.

"Tom!"

"Mr. Ketch, then," said Tom, correcting himself as he had done previously. "Both names are a mile too good for him. Ketch came into contact with some of the boys this morning before ten o'clock school, and, of course, they went into a wordy war—which is nothing new. Huntley was the only senior present, and Ketch was insolent to him. One of the boys told Ketch that he would not dare to be so next year, if Huntley should be senior boy. Ketch sneered at that, and said Huntley never would be senior boy, nor Channing either, for it was already given to Yorke. The boys took his words up, ridiculing the notion of *his* knowing anything of the matter, and they did not spare their taunts. That roused his temper, and the old fellow let out all he knew. He said Lady Augusta Yorke was at Galloway's office yesterday, boasting about it before Jenkins."

"A roundabout tale indeed," remarked Mr. Channing; "and told in a somewhat roundabout manner, Tom. I should not put faith in it. Did you hear anything of this, Arthur?"

"No, sir. I know that Lady Augusta called at the office yesterday afternoon while I was at college. I don't know anything more."

"Huntley intends to drop across Jenkins this afternoon and question him," resumed Tom Channing. "There can't be any doubt that it was he who gave the information to Ketch. If Huntley finds that Lady Augusta did assert it, the school will take the affair up."

The boast amused Hamish. "In what manner will the school be pleased to 'take it up'?" questioned he. "Recommend the dean to hold Mr. Pye under surveillance, or send Lady Augusta a challenge?"

Tom Channing nodded his head mysteriously. "There is many a true word spoken in jest, Hamish. I don't know yet what we should do; we should do something. The school won't stand it tamely. The day for that one-sided sort of oppression has gone out with our grandmothers' fashions."

"It would be very wrong of the school to stand it," said Charley, throwing in his word. "If the honours are to go by sneaking favour, and not by merit, where is the use of any of us putting out our metal?"

"You be quiet, Miss Charley. You juniors have nothing to do with it," were all the thanks the boy got from Tom.

Now the facts were really very much as Tom Channing asserted; though whether, or how far, Mr. Pye had promised, and whether Lady Augusta's boast had been a vain one, was a matter of speculation. Neither could it be surmised the part, if any, played in it by Prebendary Burrows. It was certain that Lady Augusta had, on the previous day, boasted to Mr. Galloway in his office that her son was to have the seniorship; that Mr. Pye had promised it to her and Dr. Burrows at the dinner-party. She spoke of it without the least reserve, in a tone of much self-gratulation, and she laughingly told Jenkins, who was at his desk writing, that he might wish Gerald joy when he next saw him. Jenkins took it all in for truth! It may be questioned if Mr. Galloway did, for he knew that Lady Augusta did not always weigh her words before speaking.

In the evening—this same evening, mind, after the call at the office of Lady Augusta—Mr. Jenkins proceeded towards home when he left his work. He took the road through the cloisters. As he was passing the porter's lodge, who should he see in it but his father, old Jenkins, the bedesman, holding a gossip with Ketch; and they saw him.

"If that ain't our Joe a-going past!" exclaimed the bedesman.

Joe stepped in. He was proceeding to join in the converse, when a lot of the college boys tore along, hooting and shouting, and kicking a ball about. It was kicked into the lodge, and a few compliments were thrown at the boys by the porter before they could get the ball out again. These compliments, you may be quite sure, the boys did not fail to return with interest, Tom Channing in particular being charmingly polite.

"And the saucy young beast'll be the senior boy soon!" foamed Mr. Ketch, as the lot decamped. "I wish I could get him gagged, I do!"

"No, he will not," said Joe Jenkins, speaking impulsively in his superior knowledge. "Yorke is to be senior."

"How do you know that, Joe?" asked his father.

Joe replied by relating what he had heard said by Lady Augusta that afternoon. It did not conciliate the porter in the remotest degree; he was no more favourable to Gerald Yorke than he was to Tom Channing. Had he heard the school never was to have a senior again, or a junior either, that might have pleased him.

But on the following morning, when he fell into dispute with the boys in the cloisters, he spoke out his information in a spirit of triumph over Huntley. Bit by bit, angered by the boys' taunts, he repeated every word he had heard from Jenkins. The news, as it was busily circulated from one to the other, caused no slight hubbub in the school, and gave rise to that explosion of Tom Channing's at the dinner-table.

Huntley sought Jenkins, as he had said he would do, and received the confirmation of the report, so far as the man's knowledge went. But Jenkins was terribly vexed at the report having got abroad through him. He determined to pay a visit to Mr. Ketch, and reproach him with his incaution.

Mr. Ketch sat in his lodge taking his supper—bread and cheese, and a pint of ale procured at the nearest public-house. Except in the light months of summer, it was his habit to close the cloister gates before supper-time; but as Mr. Ketch liked to take that meal early (eight o'clock), and as dusk for at least four months in the year obstinately persisted in putting itself off to a later hour in spite of his growling, and as he might not shut up before dusk, he had no resource but to eat first and lock up afterwards. The "lodge" was a quaint abode, of one room only, built in an obscure nook of the cathedral near the grand entrance. He was pursuing his meal after his own peculiar custom, eating, drinking, and grumbling.

"It's worse nor leather this cheese! Selling it to a body for double-Gloucester! I'd like to double them as made it. Eightpence a pound!—and short weight besides! I wonder there ain't a law passed to keep the cost o' provisions down!"

A pause, given chiefly to grunting, and Mr. Ketch resumed,—

"This bread's rougher nor a bear's hide! Go and ask for new, and they palms you off with stale. They'll put a loaf a week old into the oven to hot it up again, and then sell it you for new! There ought to be a criminal code made for hanging bakers. They be all cheats. They mixes up alum, and bone-dust, and plaster of Paris, and— Drat that door! Who's a-kicking at it now?"

Nobody was kicking. Somebody was civilly knocking. The door was pushed slightly open, and the inoffensive face of Mr. Joseph Jenkins appeared in the aperture.

"I say, Mr. Ketch," began he in a mild tone of deprecation, "whatever is it that you have gone and done?"

"What d'ye mean?" growled old Ketch. "Is this a way to come and set upon a gentleman in his own house? Who taught you manners, Joe Jenkins?"

"You have been repeating what I mentioned last night about Lady Augusta's son getting the seniorship," said Jenkins, coming in and closing the door.

"You did say it," retorted Mr. Ketch.

"I know I did; but I did not suppose you were going to repeat it again."

"If it was a secret, why didn't you say so?" asked

Mr. Ketch, bestowing a few more hard words upon his cheese.

"It was not exactly a secret, or Lady Augusta would not have mentioned it before me," remonstrated Joe. "But it is not the proper thing for me to come out of Mr. Galloway's office and talk of anything I may have heard said in it by his friends, and then for it to get round to his ears again. Put it to yourself, Mr. Ketch, and say whether you would like it."

"What *did* you talk of it for, then?" snarled Ketch, preparing to take a copious draught of ale.

"Because I thought you and father were safe. You might both have known better than to speak of it out of doors. There is sure to be a commotion over it."

"Miserable beer; they have took and brewed it out of ditch-water!"

"Young Mr. Huntley came to me to-day to know the rights and the wrongs of it, as he said," continued Joseph. "He spoke to Mr. Galloway about it afterwards, though I must say he was kind enough not to bring in my name; only said, in a general way, that he had 'heard' it. He is an honourable young gentleman is that Huntley. He vows the report shall be conveyed to the dean."

"Serve 'em right!" snapped the porter. "If the dean does his duty, he'll order a general flogging for the school all round. It'll do 'em good."

"Galloway did not say much, except that he knew what he should do were he Huntley's or Channing's father. Which I took to mean that, in his opinion, there ought to be an inquiry instituted."

"And you know there ought," said Mr. Ketch.

"*I* know! I'm sure I don't know," was the mild answer. "It is not my place to reflect upon my superiors, Mr. Ketch: to say they should do this, or they should do that. I like to reverence them, and to keep a civil tongue in my head."

"Which is what you don't do. If I knowed who brewed this beer I'd enter an action again him for putting in no malt. It's swipes; it ain't good wholesome beer."

"I would not have had this get about for any money," resumed Jenkins. "Neither you nor father shall ever catch me opening my lips again."

"Keep 'em shut then," growled old Ketch. "I wish them as made this bread had the eating of it! The world's full of nothing but thieves and pickpockets!"

Mr. Ketch leisurely finished his supper, and the two continued talking until dusk came on, nearly dark; for the porter, churl though he was, liked a visitor as well as anybody—possibly as a vent for his temper. He did not often get one who would stand it so meekly as Joe Jenkins. At length Mr. Jenkins lifted himself off the shut-up press bedstead on which he had been perched, and prepared to go.

"Come along of me while I lock up," said Ketch, somewhat less ungraciously than usual.

Mr. Jenkins hesitated. "My wife will be wondering what has become of me; she'll blow me up for keeping the supper waiting," debated he aloud. "But—well, I don't mind going with you this once, for company's sake," he added in his obliging yieldingness.

The large keys (two, one at each end of a string) were hung up just within the lodge door; they belonged to the two gates of the cloisters. Old Ketch took them down and went out with Jenkins, merely shutting his own door; he rarely fastened it, unless he was going some distance.

Very dark were the enclosed cloisters as they entered by the west gate. It was later than the usual hour of closing, and it was, moreover, a gloomy evening, the sky overcast as with a pall. They went through the cloisters to the south gate, Ketch grumbling all the way. He locked it, and then turned back again.

Arrived about midway of the west quadrangle, the very darkest part in all the cloisters, and the most dreary, Jenkins suddenly startled his companion by declaring there was a light in the burial-ground.

"Come along," growled Ketch. "You'll say there's corpse-candles there next."

"It is but a little spark, like," said Jenkins, halting. "I should not wonder but it is one of those pretty, innocent glow-worms."

He leaned his arms upon the mullioned frame of the open Gothic window, raised himself on tiptoe to get as complete a view as was practicable, and pushed his head out to reconnoitre the graveyard. Mr. Ketch shuffled on, the keys, held somewhat loosely in his hand by the string, clanking together.

"Be you a-going to stop there all night?" he called out, when he had gone a few paces, half turning round to speak.

At that moment a somewhat startling incident occurred. The keys were whisked out of Mr. Ketch's hand, and fell, or appeared to fall, with a clatter on the flags at his feet. He turned his anger upon Jenkins.

"Now, then, you senseless calf! What did you do that for?"

"Did you speak?" asked Jenkins, taking his elbows from the distant window-frame, and approaching.

Mr. Ketch felt a little staggered. His belief had been that Jenkins had come up silently and dashed the keys from his hand; but Jenkins, it appeared, had not left the window. However, like too many other cross-grained spirits, he persisted in venting the blame upon him.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, to play a old man such a trick?"

"I have played no trick," said Jenkins. "I thought I saw a glow-worm, and I stopped to look; but I couldn't see it again. There's no trick in that."

"Ugh!" cried the porter in his wrath. "You took and clutched the keys from me, and throwed 'em on the ground! Pick 'em up."

"Well, I never heard the like!" said Jenkins. "I was not within yards and yards of you. If you dropped the keys, it was no fault of mine." But, being a peaceably-inclined man, he stooped and found the keys.

The porter grunted. An inner current of conviction rose in his heart that he must undoubtedly have dropped them, though he could have declared at the time that they were mysteriously snatched from him. He seized the string firmly now and hobbled on to the west door, abusing Jenkins all the way.

They arrived at the west door, which was gained by a narrow closed passage from the gate of entrance, as was the south door in a similar manner; and there Mr. Ketch used his eyes and his tongue considerably, for the door, instead of being open, as he had left it, was shut and locked.

"What on earth has done this?" shrieked he.

"Done what?" asked Mr. Jenkins.

"Done what!" was the irascible echo. "*Be* you a fool, Joe Jenkins? Don't you see the door's fast?"

"Unfasten it," said Jenkins sensibly.

Mr. Ketch proceeded to do so—at least, to apply one of the keys to the lock—with much fumbling. It apparently did not occur to him to wonder how the locking process could have been effected, considering that the key had been in his own possession.

Fumbling and fumbling, now with one key, now with the other, and then with critical feeling of the keys and their wards, the truth at length burst upon the unhappy man that the keys were not the right keys, and that he and Jenkins were—locked in? The perspiration broke out over him as large as peas.

"They *must* be the keys," remonstrated Mr. Jenkins.

"They are *not* the keys," shrieked Ketch. "D'ye think I don't know my own keys, now I come to feel 'em?"

"But they were your keys that fell down and that I picked up," argued Jenkins, perfectly sure in his own mind that they could be no others. "There was not a fairy in the cloisters to come and change them."

"Feel 'em!" roared Ketch in his despair. "These be a couple of horrid, rusty old things as can't have been in use since the cloisters was built. *You* have changed 'em, you have!" he sobbed, the notion taking possession of him forcibly. "You are a-doing it to play me a infamous trick, and I'll have you up before the dean to-morrow! I'll shake the life out of you, I will!"

Laying summary hold of Mr. Jenkins, he began to shake him with all his feeble strength. The latter soon extricated himself, and he succeeded in impressing on the man the fallacy of his suspicion. "Don't I want to get home to my supper and my wife? Don't I tell you that she'll set upon me like anything for keeping it waiting?" he meekly remonstrated. "Do I want to be locked up in these unpleasant cloisters? Give me the keys, and let me try them."

Ketch, in sheer helplessness, was fain to comply. He resigned the keys to Jenkins, and Jenkins tried them; but he was none the nearer unlocking the gate. In their increasing perplexity they resolved to return to the place in the quadrangle where the keys had fallen—a very forlorn suggestion proceeding from Mr. Jenkins that the right keys might be lying there still, and that this rusty pair might, by some curious and unaccountable chance, have been lying there also.

They commenced their search, disputing, the one hotly, the other temperately, as to which was the exact spot. With feet and hands they hunted as well as the dark would allow them. All in vain. And Ketch gave vent to a loud burst of feeling when he realized the fact that they were positively locked up in the cloisters, beyond hope of succour, in the dark and lonely night.

CHAPTER XII.

A MISHAP TO THE BISHOP OF HELSTONLEIGH.

"FORDHAM, I wonder whether the cloisters are closed?"

"I will see, my lord."

The question came from the Bishop of Helstonleigh, who, as it fell out, had been to make an evening call upon the dean. The dean's servant was now conducting his lordship down the grand staircase on his departure. In proceeding to the palace from the deanery, to go through the cloisters cut off quite two-thirds of the distance.

Fordham quitted the hall, a lamp in his hand, and traversed sundry passages which brought him to the deanery garden. Crossing the garden, and treading another short passage, he came to the cloisters. The bishop had followed, lighted by Fordham, and talking affably. A very pleasant man was the Bishop of Helstonleigh, standing little upon forms and ceremonies. In frame he was nearly as active as a college boy.

"It is all right, I think, my lord," said Fordham. "I hear the porter's voice now in the cloisters."

"How dark it is!" exclaimed the bishop. "Ketch must be closing late to-night. What a noise he is making."

In point of fact, Mr. Ketch had just arrived at that agreeable moment which concluded the last chapter—the conviction that no other keys were to be found, and that he and Jenkins were fast. The tone in which he was making his sentiments known upon the calamity was not a subdued one.

"Shall I light you round, my lord?"

"By no means, by no means. I shall be up with Ketch in a minute. He seems in a passion. Good-night, Fordham."

"Good-night to your lordship."

The servant went back to the deanery. The prelate groped his way round to the west quadrangle.

"Are you closing, Ketch?"

Mr. Ketch started as if he had been shot, and his noise dropped to a calm. Truth to say, his style of complaint had not been orthodox—not exactly suitable to the ears of his bishop. He and Jenkins both recognized the voice, and bowed low, dark though it was.

"What is the matter, Ketch? You are making enough noise."

"Matter, my lord!" groaned Ketch. "Here's matter enough to make a saint—saving your lordship's presence—forget his prayers. We be locked up in the cloisters."

"Locked up!" repeated the bishop. "What do you mean? Who is with you?"

"It is me, my lord," said Jenkins meekly, answering for himself: "Joseph Jenkins, my lord, at Mr. Galloway's. I came in with the porter just for company, my lord, when he came to lock up, and we have somehow got locked in."

The bishop demanded an explanation. It was not very easily afforded. Ketch and Jenkins talked one against the other; and when the bishop did at length get to comprehend the tale, he scarcely gave credence to it.

"It is an incomprehensible story, Ketch, that you should drop your keys, and they should get changed for others as they lay on the flags. Are you sure you brought out the right keys?"

"My lord, I *couldn't* bring out any others," returned Ketch, in a tone that longed to betray its resentment, and would have betrayed it to anybody but a bishop. "I haven't got no others to bring, my lord. Them two keys hangs up on the nail always, and there ain't another key besides in the house, save the door key."

"Some one must have changed them previously—must have hung up these in their places," remarked the bishop.

"But, my lord, it couldn't be, I say," reiterated old Ketch, nearly shrieking. "I know the keys just as well as I know my own hands, and they was the right keys that I brought out. The best proof, my lord, is that I locked the south door fast enough; and how could I have done that with these wretched old rusty things?"

"The keys must be on the flags still," said his lordship.

"That is the only conclusion I can come to, my lord," mildly put in Jenkins. "But we cannot find them."

"And meanwhile we are locked in for the night, and here's his right reverend lordship, the bishop, locked in with us!" danced old Ketch, nearly beside himself with anger. "Of course, it wouldn't matter for me and Jenkins: speaking in comparison, we are nobody; but it is a shameful indignity for my lord."

"We must try and get out, Ketch," said his lordship.

in a tone that sounded as if he were more inclined to laugh than cry. "I will go back to the deanery."

Away went the bishop as quickly as the gloom allowed him, and away went the other two in his wake. Arrived at the passage which led from the cloisters to the deanery garden, they groped their way to its end, only to find the door closed and locked.

"Well, this is a pleasant situation!" exclaimed the bishop, his tone betraying amusement as well as annoyance; and with his own prelatical hands he pummelled at the door, and shouted with his own prelatical voice. When the bishop was tired, Jenkins and Ketch set on to pummel and to shout; and they pummelled and shouted till their knuckles were sore and their throats were hoarse. It was all in vain. The garden intervened between them and the deanery, and they could not be heard.

It certainly was a pretty situation, as the prelate remarked. The Right Reverend the Bishop of Helstonleigh, ranking about fifth, counting by precedence, on the episcopal bench, locked up ignominiously in the cloisters of Helstonleigh with Ketch the porter and Jenkins the steward's clerk; likely, so far as appearances might be trusted, to have to pass the night there! The like had never yet been heard of.

The bishop went to the south gate and tried the keys himself; the bishop went to the west gate and tried them there; the bishop stamped about the west quadrangle, hoping to stam. upon the missing keys; but nothing came of it. Ketch and Jenkins attended him, Ketch grumbling in the most angry terms that he dared, Jenkins in humble silence.

"I really do not see what is to be done," debated the bishop, who, no doubt, wished himself well out of the dilemma, like any less exalted mortal would have done. "The doors leading into the college are sure to be closed."

"Quite sure," groaned Ketch.

"And to get into the college would not serve us, that I see," added the bishop. "We should be no better off there than here."

"Saving that we might ring the bell, my lord," suggested Jenkins, with deference.

They proceeded to the college gates. It was a forlorn hope, and one that did not serve them. The gates were locked, the doors closed behind them. No getting to the bell that way; it might as well have been a hundred miles off.

They traversed the cloisters again, and tried the door of the schoolroom. It was locked. Had it not been, the senior boy might have expected punishment from the head-master. They tried the small door leading into the residence of Dr. Burrows—fast also; that abode just now was empty. The folding-doors of the chapter-house were opened easily, and they entered. But what did it avail them? There was the large, round room lined with its books, furnished with its immense table and easy-chairs; but it was as much shut in from the hearing of the world outside as they were. The bishop came in contact with a chair, and sat down in it. Jenkins, who, as clerk to Mr. Galloway, the steward to the dean and chapter, was familiar with the chapter-house, felt his way to the spot where he knew matches were sometimes kept. He could not find any; it was the time of light evenings.

"There's just one chance, my lord," suggested Jenkins—"that the little unused door at the corner of the cloisters, leading into the body of the cathedral, may not be locked."

"Precious careless of them sextons if it is not!" grunted Ketch.

"It is a door nobody ever thinks of going in at, my lord," returned Jenkins, as if he would apologize for the sexton's carelessness, should it be found unfastened. "If it is open, we might get to the bell."

"Them sextons, proud, stuck-up gentlemen, be made up of carelessness and anything else that's bad, they be!" groaned Ketch. "Holding up their heads above us porters!"

It was worth the trial. The bishop rose from the chair and groped his way out of the chapter-house, the two others following.

"If it hadn't been for that Jenkins's folly, a-fancying he saw a light in the burying-ground, and me turning round to order him to come on, it might not have happened," grumbled Ketch, as they wound round the cloisters.

"A light in the burial-ground!" hastily repeated the bishop. "What light?"

"Oh, a corpse-candle, or some nonsense of that sort, he had got his mind running on, my lord. Half of the world is idiots, and Jenkins is the biggest of 'em."

"My lord," spoke poor Jenkins deprecatingly, "I never had such a thought within me as that it was a 'corpse-candle.' I said I fancied it might be a glow-worm. And I believe it was one, my lord."

"A more sensible thought than the other," observed the prelate.

Luck at last! The door was found to be unlocked. It was a low, narrow door, only used on the very rare occasion of a funeral, and was situated in a shady, out-of-the-way nook, where nobody ever thought of looking. "Oh come, this is something!" cried the bishop cheerily, as he stepped into the cathedral.

"And your lordship now sees what fine careless sextons we have got!" struck in Ketch.

"We must overlook their carelessness this time, in consideration of the service it renders us," said the bishop in a kindly tone. "Take care of the pillars, Ketch."

"Thank ye, my lord. I'm a-going along with my hands held out afore me to save my head," returned Ketch.

Most likely the bishop and Jenkins were doing the same. Dexterously steering clear of the pillars, they emerged in the wide, open body of the cathedral, and bent their steps across it to the spot where hung the ropes of the bells.

The head sexton to the cathedral—whom you must not confound with a gravedigger, as you might an ordinary sexton, cathedral sextons being personages of more importance—was seated about this hour at supper in his home, close to the cathedral. Suddenly the deep-toned college bell boomed out, and the man started as if a gun had been fired at him.

"Why, that's the college bell!" he uttered to his family. And the family stared with open mouths, replying not.

The college bell it certainly was, and it was striking out sharp irregular strokes, as though the ringer was not accustomed to his work. The sexton started up in a state of the most amazed consternation.

"It is magic—it is nothing less—that the bell should be ringing out at this hour!" exclaimed he.

"Father," suggested a juvenile, finding his tongue, "perhaps somebody's got locked up in the college." For which prevision he was rewarded with a stinging smack on the head.

"Take that, sir! D'ye think I don't know better than to lock folks up in the college? It was me myself as locked up this evening."

"No need to box him for that," resented the wife. "The bell *is* ringing, and I'll be bound the boy's right enough. One of them masons must have fell asleep in the day, and has just woke up to find himself shut in. Hope he likes his berth!"

Whatever it might be ringing the bell, whether magic or a mason, of course it must be seen to; and the sexton hastened out, the keys of the cathedral in his hand. He bent his steps towards the front entrance, passing the cloisters, which, as he knew, would be locked at that hour. "And that bear of a Ketch won't hurry himself to unlock them," soliloquized he.

He found the front gates surrounded. The bell had struck upon the wondering ears of many living within the precincts of the cathedral, who flocked out to ascertain the reason. Amongst others, the college boys were coming up in troops.

"Now, good people, please—by your leave!" cried the sexton. "Let me get to the gates."

They made way for the man and his ponderous keys, and the ingress to the college was gained. The sexton was beginning a sharp reproof to the "mason," and the crowd preparing a chorus to it, when they were seized with consternation, and fell back on each other's toes. It was the Bishop of Helstonleigh, in his laced-up hat and apron, who walked forth.

The sexton humbly snatched off his hat; the college boys raised their trenchers.

"Thank you all for coming to the rescue," said the bishop in a pleasant tone. "It was not an agreeable situation to be locked in the cathedral."

"My lord," stammered the sexton, in awe-struck dread as to whether he had unwittingly been the culprit, "how did your lordship get locked in?"

"That is what we must inquire into," replied the bishop.

The next to hobble out was Ketch. In his own fashion, almost ignoring the presence of the bishop, he made known the tale. It was received with disbelieving ridicule. The college boys especially cast mockery towards it, and began dancing a jig when the bishop's back was turned. "Let a couple of keys drop down, and when picked up you found them transmogrified into old rusty machines, made in the year one!" cried Bywater. "*That's* very like a whale, Ketch!"

Ketch tore off to his lodge as fast as his lumbago allowed him, calling upon the crowd to come and look at the nail where the keys always hung, save when in use, and holding out the rusty dissemblers for the public view, in a furious passion.

He dashed open the door. The college boys, pushing before the crowd, and following on the bishop's heels—who had probably his own reasons for wishing to see the solution of the affair—thronged into the lodge. "There's the nail, my lord, and there——"

Ketch stopped, dumbfounded. On the nail, hanging by the string, as quietly as if they had hung for ages, were the cloister keys. Ketch rubbed his eyes, and stared, and rubbed again. The bishop smiled.

"I told you, Ketch, I thought you must be mistaken in supposing you brought the proper keys out."

Ketch burst into a sobbing wail of anger and deprecation. "He had took out the right keys, and Jenkins could bear him out in the assertion. Some wicked trick had been played upon him, and the keys brought back during his absence and hung up on their hook! He'd lay his life it was the college boys!"

The bishop turned his eyes on those young gentlemen. But nothing could be more innocent than their countenances as they stood before him in their trenchers. Rather too innocent, perhaps; and the bishop's eyes twinkled, and a half smile crossed his lips, but he made no sign. Well would it be if all the clergy were as sweet-tempered as the Bishop of Helstonleigh!

"Well, Ketch, take care of your keys for the future," was all he said as he walked away.—"Good-night, boys."

"Good-night to your lordship," replied the boys, once more raising their trenchers; and the crowd outside respectfully saluted their prelate, who returned it in kind.

"What are you waiting for, Thorpe?" the bishop demanded, when he found the sexton was still at the great gates, holding them about an inch open.

"For Jenkins, my lord," was the reply. "Ketch said he was also locked in."

"Certainly he was," replied the bishop. "Has he not come forth?"

"That he has not, my lord. I have let nobody whatever out except your lordship and the porter. I have called out to him, but he does not answer, and does not come."

"He went up into the organ-loft in search of a candle and matches," remarked the bishop. "You had better go after him, Thorpe. He may not know that the doors are open."

The bishop left, crossing over to the palace. Thorpe, calling one of the old bedesmen, some of whom had come up then, left him in charge of the gate, and did as he was ordered. He descended the steps, passed through the wide doors, and groped his way in the dark towards the choir.

"Jenkins!"

There was no answer.

"Jenkins!" called out he again.

Still there was no answer, save the sound of the sexton's own voice as it echoed in the silence of the large edifice.

"Well, this is a odd go!" exclaimed Thorpe, as he leaned against a pillar and surveyed the darkness of the cathedral. "He can't have melted away into a ghost, or dropped down into the crypt among the coffins. Jenkins, I say!"

With a word of impatience at the continued silence, the sexton returned to the entrance gates. All that could be done was to get a light and search for him.

They procured a lantern, Ketch ungraciously supplying it; and the sexton, taking two or three of the spectators with him, proceeded to the search. "He has gone to sleep in the organ-loft, that is what he has done," cried Thorpe, making known what the bishop had said.

Alas! Jenkins had not gone to sleep. At the foot of the steps leading to the organ-loft they came upon him. He was lying there insensible, blood oozing from a wound on the forehead. How had it come about? What had caused it?

Meanwhile the college boys, after driving Mr. Ketch nearly wild with their jokes and ridicule touching the mystery of the keys, were scared by the sudden appearance of the headmaster. They decamped as fast as their legs could carry them, bringing themselves to an anchor at a safe distance, under shade of the friendly elm trees. Bywater stuck his back against one, and his laughter came forth in peals. Some of the rest tried to stop it, whispering caution.

"It's of no good talking, you fellows! I can't keep it in; I shall burst if I try. I have been at bursting point ever since I twitched the keys out of his hands in the cloisters, and threw the rusty ones down. You see I was right—that it was best for one of us to go in without our boots, and to wait. If half a dozen had gone, we should never have got away unheard."

"*I* pretty nearly burst when I saw the bishop come out instead of Ketch," cried Tod Yorke. "Burst with fright."

"So did a few more of us," said Galloway. "I say, will there be a row?"

"Goodness knows! He is a kind old chap is the bishop. Better for it to have been him than the dean."

"What was it Ketch said about Jenkins seeing a glow-worm?"

"Oh," shrieked Bywater, holding his sides, "that was the best of all! I had got a lucifer out of my pocket, playing with it while they went round to the south gate, and it suddenly struck fire. I threw it over to the burial-ground, and that soft Jenkins took it for a glow-worm."

"It's a stunning go!" emphatically concluded Mr. Tod Yorke. "The best we have had this half yet."

"Hush—sh—sh—sh!" whispered the boys under their breath. "There goes the master."

CHAPTER XIII.

MAD NANCE.

Mr. Galloway was in his office. Mr. Galloway was fuming and fretting at the non-arrival of his clerk, Mr. Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins was a punctual man; in fact, more than punctual. His proper time for arriving at the office was half-past nine, but the cathedral clock had rarely struck the quarter-past before Mr. Jenkins would be at his post. Things seem to go by contrary in this world. Almost any other morning it would not have mattered a straw to Mr. Galloway whether Jenkins was a little after or a little before his time; but on this particular morning he had especial need of him, and had come himself to the office unusually early.

One-two, three-four! chimed the quarters of the cathedral. "There it goes, half-past nine!" ejaculated Mr. Galloway. "What *does* Jenkins mean by it? He knew he was wanted early."

A sharp knock at the office door, and there entered a little dark woman in a black bonnet and a beard. She was Mr. Jenkins's better half, and had the reputation for being very considerably the gray mare.

"Good-morning, Mr. Galloway. A pretty kettle of fish this is!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Mr. Galloway, surprised at the address. "Where's Jenkins?"

"Jenkins is in bed with his head plastered up. He's the greatest booby living, and would positively have come here all the same, but I told him I'd strap him down with cords if he attempted it. A pretty object he'd have looked, staggering through the streets, with his head big enough for two, and held together with white plaster!"

"What has he done to his head?" wondered Mr. Galloway.

"Good gracious! have you not heard?" exclaimed the lady, whose mode of speech was rarely overburdened with polite words of compliment, though she meant no disrespect. "He got locked up the cloisters last night with old Ketch and the bishop."

Mr. Galloway stared at her. He had been dining the previous evening with some friends at the other end of the town, and knew nothing of the occurrence. Had he been within hearing when the college bell tolled out at night, he would have run to ascertain the cause as eagerly as any schoolboy. "Locked up in the cloisters with old Ketch and the bishop!" he repeated in amazement. "I do not understand."

Mrs. Jenkins proceeded to enlighten him. She gave the explanation of the strange affair of the keys as it had been given to her by the unlucky Joe. While telling it Arthur Channing entered, and almost immediately afterwards Roland Yorke.

"The bishop, of all people!" uttered Mr. Galloway. "What an untoward thing for his lordship!"

"No more untoward for him than for others," retorted the lady. "It just serves Jenkins right. What business had he to go dancing through the cloisters with old Ketch and his keys?"

"But how did Jenkins get hurt?" asked Mr. Galloway, for that particular point had not yet been touched upon.

"He is the greatest fool going is Jenkins," was the complimentary retort of Jenkins's wife. "After he had helped to ring out the bell, he must needs go poking and groping into the organ-loft, hunting for matches or some such insane rubbish. He might have known, had he possessed any sense, that candles and matches are not likely to be there in summer time! Why, if the organist wanted ever so much to stop in after dark, when the college is locked up for the night, he wouldn't be allowed to do it! It's only in winter, when he has to light a candle to get through the afternoon service, that they keep matches and dips up there."

"But about his head?" repeated Mr. Galloway, who was aware of the natural propensity of Mrs. Jenkins to wander from the point in discussion.

"Yes, about his head!" she wrathfully answered. "In attempting to descend the stairs again, he missed his footing, and pitched right down to the bottom of the flight. That's how his head came in for it. He wants a nurse with him always does Jenkins, for he is no better than a child in leading-strings."

"Is he much hurt?"

"And there he'd have lain till morning but for the bishop," resumed Mrs. Jenkins, paying no attention to the inquiry. "After his lordship got out, he, finding Jenkins did not come, told Thorpe to go and look for him in the organ-loft. Thorpe said he should have done nothing of the sort but for the bishop's order; he was just going to lock the great doors again, and there Jenkins would have been, fast! They found him lying at the foot of the stairs, just inside the choir gates, with no more life in him than there is in a dead man."

"I asked you whether he is seriously hurt, Mrs. Jenkins."

"Pretty well. He came to his senses as they were bringing him home, and somebody ran for Hurst, the surgeon. He is better this morning."

"But not well enough to come to business?"

"Hurst told him if he worried himself with business or anything else to-day, he'd get brain fever as sure as a gun. He ordered him to stop in bed, and to keep quiet, if he could."

"Of course he must do so," observed Mr. Galloway.

"There is no course in it when men are the actors," dissented Mrs. Jenkins. "Hurst did well to say 'if he could,' when ordering him to keep quiet. I'd rather have an animal ill in the house than I'd have a man—they are ten times more reasonable. There has Jenkins been tormenting himself ever since seven o'clock this morning about coming here; he was wanted particularly, he said. 'Would you go if you were dead?' I asked him; and he stood it out that if he were dead it would be a different thing. 'Not different at all,' I said. A nice thing it would be to have to nurse him through a brain fever!"

"I am grieved that it should have happened," said Mr. Galloway kindly. "Tell him from me that we can manage very well without him. He must not venture here again until Mr. Hurst says he may come with safety."

"I should have told him that to pacify him whether you had said it or not," candidly avowed Mrs. Jenkins. "And now I must go back home on the run. As good have no one to mind my shop as that young house-girl of ours. If a customer comes in for a pair of black stockings, she'll take and give 'em a white knitted nightcap! She's as deficient of common sense as Jenkins is. Your servant, sir.—Good-morning, young gentlemen!"

"Here, wait a minute!" cried Mr. Galloway as she was speeding off. "I cannot comprehend it at all. The keys could not have been changed as they lay on the flags."

"Neither can anybody else comprehend it," returned Mrs. Jenkins. "If Jenkins was not a sober man—and he had better let me catch him being anything else!—I should say the two, him and Ketch, had had a drop too much. The bishop himself could make neither top nor tail of it. It'll teach Jenkins not to go gallavanting again after other folk's business!"

She finally turned away, and Mr. Galloway set himself to revolve the perplexing narrative. The more he thought, the less he was nearer doing so; like the bishop, he could make neither top nor tail of it. "It is entirely incredible," he remarked to Arthur Channing, "unless Ketch took out the wrong keys!"

"And if he took out the wrong keys, how could he have locked the south door?" interrupted Roland Yorke. "I'd lay anybody five shillings that those mischievous scamps of college boys were at the bottom of it! I taxed Gerald with it, and he flew at me for my pains. But the seniors may not have been in it. You should have heard the bell clank out last night, Mr. Galloway!"

"I suppose it brought out a few," was Mr. Galloway's rejoinder.

"It did that," said Arthur Channing—"myself for one

When I saw the bishop emerge from the college doors, I could scarcely believe my sight."

"I'd have given half a crown to see him!" cried Roland Yorke. "If there's any fun going on, it is sure to be my fate to miss it! Cator was at my house, having a cigar with me; and though we heard the bell, we did not disturb ourselves to see what it might mean."

"What is your opinion of last night's work, Arthur?" asked Mr. Galloway, returning to the point.

Arthur's opinion was a very decided one, but he did not choose to say so. The meeting with the college boys at their stealthy post in the cloisters, when he and Hamish were passing through at dusk a few nights previously, coupled with the hints then thrown out of the "serving out" of Ketch, could leave little doubt as to the culprits. Arthur returned an answer couched in general terms.

"Could it have been the college boys, think you?" debated Mr. Galloway.

"Not being a college boy, I cannot speak positively, sir," he said, laughing. "Gaunt knows nothing of it. I met him as I was going home to breakfast from my early hour's work here, and he told me he did not. There would have been no harm done, after all, but for the accident to Jenkins."

"One of you gentlemen can just step in to see Jenkins in the course of the day, and reassure him that he is not wanted," said Mr. Galloway. "I know how necessary it is to keep the mind tranquil in any fear of brain affection."

No more was said, and the occupation of the day began. A busy day was that at Mr. Galloway's, much to the chagrin of Roland Yorke, who had an unconquerable objection to doing too much. He broke out into grumblings at Arthur when the latter came running in from his duty at college.

"I'll tell you what it is, Channing: you ought not to have made the bargain to go to that bothering organ on busy days; and Galloway must have been out of his mind to let you make it. Look at the heap of work there is to do!"

"I will soon make up for the lost hour," said Arthur, setting to with a will. "Where's Mr. Galloway?"

"Gone to the bank," grumbled Roland. "And I have had to answer a dozen callers-in at least, and do all my writing besides. I wonder what possessed Jenkins to go and knock his head to powder?"

Mr. Galloway shortly returned, and sat down to write. It was a thing he rarely did; he left writing to his clerks, unless it was the writing of letters. By one o'clock the chief portion of the work was done, and Mr. Roland Yorke's spirits recovered their elasticity. He went home then to dinner as usual. Arthur preferred to remain at his post and get on further, sending the housekeeper's little maid out for a twopenny roll, which he devoured as he wrote. He was of a remarkably conscientious nature, and deemed it only fair to sacrifice a little time in case of need, in return for the great favour which had been granted him by Mr. Galloway. Many of the families who had sons in the college school dined at one o'clock, it being the most convenient hour for the boys. Hearty, growing youths are not satisfied with anything less substantial than a dinner in the middle of the day, and two dinners in a household tell upon the pocket. The Channings did not afford two, neither did Lady Augusta Yorke; so their hour was one o'clock.

"What a muff you must be to go without your dinner!" cried Roland Yorke to Arthur when he returned at two o'clock. "*I* wouldn't."

"I have had my dinner," said Arthur.

"What did you have?" cried Roland, pricking up his ears. "Did Galloway send to the eating-house for roast duck and green peas? That's what we had at home, and the peas were half boiled, and the ducks were scorched, and cooked without stuffing. A wretched set of incapables our house turns out! and my lady does not know how to alter it. You have actually finished that deed, Channing?"

"It is finished, you see. It is surprising how much one can do in a quiet hour."

"Is Galloway out?"

Arthur pointed with his pen to the door of Mr. Galloway's private room to indicate that he was in it. "He is writing letters."

"I say, Channing, there's positively nothing left to do," went on Roland, casting his eyes over the desk. "Here are these leases, but they are not wanted until to-morrow. Who says we can't work in this office?"

Arthur laughed good-naturedly to think of the small amount out of that day's work which had fallen to the share of Roland.

Some time elapsed. Mr. Galloway came into their room from his own to consult a "Bradshaw," which lay on the shelf alongside Jenkins's desk. He held in his hand a very closely-written letter. It was of large letter-paper size, and appeared to be filled on its four sides. While he was looking at the book the cathedral clock chimed out the three-quarters past two, and the bell rang out for divine service.

"It can never be that time of day!" exclaimed Mr. Galloway in consternation as he took out his watch. "Sixteen minutes to three, and I am a minute slow! How has the time passed? I ought to have been at——"

Mr. Galloway brought his words to a standstill, apparently too absorbed in the railway guide to conclude them. Roland Yorke, who had a free tongue even with his master, filled up the pause.

"Were you going out, sir?"

"Is that any business of yours, Mr. Roland? Talking won't fill in that lease, sir."

"The lease is not in a hurry, sir," returned the incorrigible Roland. But he held his tongue then, and bent his head over his work.

Mr. Galloway dipped his pen in the ink and copied something from "Bradshaw" into the closely-written letter, standing at Jenkins's desk to do it; then he passed the blotting-paper quickly over the words and folded the letter.

"Channing," he said, speaking very hastily, "you will see a twenty-pound bank-note on my desk, and the directed envelope of this letter. Bring them here."

Arthur went, and brought forth the envelope and bank-note. Mr. Galloway doubled the note in four and slipped it between the folds of the letter, putting both in the envelope. He had fastened it down when a loud noise and commotion was heard in the street. Curious as are said to be antiquated maidens, Mr. Galloway rushed to the window and threw it up, his two clerks attending in his wake.

Something very fine, in a white dress, and pink and scarlet flowers in her bonnetless head, as if attired for an evening party, was whirling round the middle of the road in circles—a tall woman, who must have been beautiful once. She appeared to be whirling somebody else with her amid laughter and shrieks and cries and groans of the whirlers and the gathering mob.

"It is Mad Nance!" uttered Mr. Galloway. "Poor thing! she really ought to be in confinement."

So everybody had said for a long while, but nobody bestirred themselves to place her in it. This unfortunate creature, Mad Nance, as she was called, was sufficiently harmless to be at large on sufferance, and sufficiently mad at times to put a street in an uproar. In her least sane moments she would appear, as now, in an old dimity white dress, scrupulously washed and ironed, and decorated with innumerable frills; some natural flowers, generally wild ones, in her hair. Dandelions were her favourites; she would make them into a wreath, and fasten it on, letting her entangled hair hang beneath. To-day she had contrived to pick up some geranium blossoms, scarlet and pink.

"Who is it that she has got hold of there?" exclaimed Mr. Galloway. "He does not seem to like it."

Arthur burst into laughter as loud as the woman's when he discovered that it was Harper, the lay-clerk. This unlucky gentleman, who had been quietly and inoffensively proceeding up Close Street on his way to service in the cathedral, was seized upon by Mad Nance by the two hands. He was a thin, weak little man, a very reed in her strong hands. She shrieked, she laughed, she danced, she flew with him round and round. He shrieked also; his hat was off, his wig was gone—and it was half the business of Mr. Harper's life to make that wig appear a real one. He talked, he raved, he remonstrated; I am very much afraid he swore. Mr. Galloway laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, as did Arthur.

The crowd was parted by an authoritative hand, and the same hand, gentle now, laid its firmness upon the woman and released the prisoner. It was Hamish Channing who had come to the rescue, suppressing his mirth as he best could while he effected it.

"I'll have the law of her!" panted Harper as he picked up his hat and wig. "If there's justice to be got in Helstonleigh, she shall suffer for this! It's a town's shame to let her go about, molesting peaceable wayfarers, and shaking the life out of them!"

Something at a distance appeared to attract the attention of the unhappy woman, and she flew away. Hamish and Mr. Harper were left alone in the street, the latter still exploding with wrath, and vowing all sorts of revenge.

"Put up with it quietly, Harper," advised Hamish. "She is like a little child—not accountable for her actions."

"That's just like you, Mr. Hamish Channing. If they took your head off, you'd put up with it! How would you like your wig flung away in the sight of a whole street?"

"I don't wear one," laughed Hamish. "Here's your hat, not much damaged, apparently."

Mr. Harper, settling his wig on his head, and composing himself as he best could, continued his way to the cathedral, turning his hat about in his hand and closely regarding it. Hamish stepped across to Mr. Galloway's, meeting that gentleman at the door.

"A good thing you came up as you did, Mr. Hamish. Harper will remember Mad Nance for a year to come."

"I expect he will," replied Hamish, laughing still. Mr. Galloway laughed also, and walked hastily down the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

KEEPING OFFICE.

Hamish entered the office. Arthur and Roland Yorke had their heads stretched out of the window, and did not hear his footsteps. He advanced quietly, and brought his hands down hastily upon the shoulder of each. Roland started, and gave his head a knock against the window-frame.

"How you startle a fellow! I thought it was Mad Nance come in to seize hold of me."

"She has seized hold of enough for one day," said Hamish. "Harper will dream of her to-night."

"I thought Galloway would have gone into a fit, he laughed so," cried Arthur. "As for my sides, they'll ache for an hour."

Roland Yorke's lip curled with an angry expression. "My opinion coincides with Harper's," he said. "I think Mad Nance ought to be punished. We are none of us safe from her if this is to be the game."

"If you punish her to-day she would do the same again to-morrow, if the fit came over her," rejoined Hamish. "It is not often she breaks out like this. The only thing is to steer clear of her."

"Hamish has a fellow-feeling for that Mad Nance," mockingly spoke Roland Yorke.

"Yes, poor thing! for her story is a sad one. If the same grievous wrong were worked upon some of us, perhaps we might go and take to dancing for the benefit of the public. Talking of the public, Arthur," continued Hamish, turning to his brother, "what became of you at dinner-time? The mother was for setting the town-crier to work."

"I could not get home to-day. We have had double work to do, as Jenkins is away."

Hamish tilted himself on to the edge of Mr. Jenkins's desk and took up the letter, apparently in abstraction, which Mr. Galloway had left there, ready for the post. "Mr. Robert Galloway, Sea-View Terrace, Ventnor, Isle of Wight," read he aloud. "That must be Mr. Galloway's cousin," he remarked—"the one who has got through so much money."

"Of course it is," answered Roland Yorke. "Galloway pretty near keeps him, I know. There's a twenty-pound bank-note going to him in that letter. Catch me doing it if I were Galloway!"

"I wish it was going into my pocket instead," said Hamish, balancing the letter on his fingers as if he wished to test its weight.

"I wish the clouds would drop sovereigns! But they don't come any the quicker for my wishing it," said Roland Yorke.

Hamish put the letter back from whence he had taken it, and jumped off the desk. "I must be walking," said he. "Stopping here will not do my work. If we——"

"By Jove, there's Knivett!" uttered Roland Yorke. "Where's he off to so fast? I have something that I must tell him."

Snatching up his hat, Roland darted at full speed out of the office in search of one who was running at full speed also down the street. Hamish looked out, amused, at the chase; Arthur, who had called after Roland in vain, seemed vexed. "Knivett is one of the fleetest runners in Helstonleigh," said Hamish. "Yorke will scarcely catch him up."

"I wish Yorke would allow himself a little thought, and not act upon impulse," exclaimed Arthur. "I cannot stop three minutes longer, and he knows that. I shall be late for college."

He was already preparing to go thither. Putting some papers in order upon his desk, and locking up others, he carried the letter for Ventnor into Mr. Galloway's private room, and put it into the letter rack. Two others, ready for the post, were lying there. Then he went to the front door to look out for Yorke. Yorke was not to be seen.

"What a thoughtless fellow he is!" exclaimed Arthur in his vexation. "What is to be done? Hamish, you will have to stop here."

"Thank you! What else?" asked Hamish.

"I must be at college, whatever betide." Which was true; yet neither might the office be left vacant. Arthur grew a little flurried. "Do stay, Hamish; it will not hinder you five minutes, I dare say. Yorke is sure to be in."

Hamish came to the door, halting on its first step, and looking out over Arthur's shoulder. He drew his head in again with a sudden movement.

"Is not that old Hopper down there?" he asked below his breath, the tone sounding like one of fear.

Arthur turned his eyes on a shabby old man who was crossing the end of the street, and saw Hopper, the sheriff's officer. "Yes; why?"

"It is that old fellow who holds the writ. He may be on the watch for me now. I can't go out just yet, Arthur; I'll stay here till Yorke comes back."

He returned to the office, sat down, and leaned his brow upon his hand. A strange brow of care it was just then, ill according with the gay face of Hamish Channing. Arthur, waiting for no second permission, flew towards the cathedral as fast as his long legs would carry him. The dean and chapter were preparing to leave the chapter-house as he tore past it through the cloisters. Three o'clock was striking. Arthur's heart and breath were alike panting when he gained the dark stairs. At that moment, to his excessive astonishment, the organ began to peal forth.

Seated at it was Mr. Williams, and a few words of explanation ensued. The organist said he should remain for the service, which rendered Arthur at liberty to go back again.

He was retracing his steps underneath the elm trees in the Boundaries, at a less swift pace than he had recently passed them, when, in turning a corner, he came face to face with the sheriff's officer. Arthur, whose thoughts were at that moment fixed upon Hamish and his difficulties, started away from the man in an impulse for which he could not have accounted.

"No need for you to be frightened of me, Mr. Arthur," said the man, who in his more palmy days, before he learnt to take more drink than was good for him, had been a clerk in Mr. Channing's office. "I have got nothing about me that will bite you."

He laid a stress upon the "you" in both cases. Arthur understood only too well what was meant, though he would not appear to do so.

"Nor anybody else either, I hope, Hopper. A warm day, is it not?"

Hopper drew close to Arthur, not looking at him, apparently examining with hands and eyes the trunk of the elm tree underneath which they had halted. "You tell your brother not to put himself in my way," he said in a low tone, his lips scarcely moving. "He is in a bit of trouble, as I suppose you know."

"Yes," breathed Arthur.

"Well, I don't want to serve the writ upon him; I won't serve it, unless he makes me by throwing himself within length of my arm. If he sees me coming up one street, let him cut down another, into a shop, anywhere; I have got eyes that only see when I want 'em to. I come prowling about here once or twice a day for show, but I come at a time when I am pretty sure he can't be seen—just gone out or just gone in. I'd rather not harm him."

"You are not so considerate to all," said Arthur, after a pause given to revolving the words, and to wonder whether they were spoken in good faith or with some insidious purpose. He could not decide.

"No, I am not," pointedly returned Hopper in answer. "There are some that I look after sharp as a ferret looks after a rat, but I'll never do that by any son of Mr. Channing's. I can't forget the old days, sir, when your father was kind to me. He stood by me longer than my own friends did; but for him I should have starved in that long illness I had when the office would have me no longer. Why don't Mr. Hamish settle this?" he abruptly added.

"I suppose he cannot," answered Arthur.

"It is but a bagatelle at the worst, and our folks would not have gone to extremities if he had shown only a disposition to settle. I am sure that if he would go to them now, and pay down a ten-pound note, and say, 'You shall have the rest as I can get it,' they'd withdraw proceedings; ay, even for five pounds I believe they would. Tell him to do it, Mr. Arthur; tell him I always know which way the wind blows with our people."

"I will tell him, but I fear he is very short of money just now. Five or ten pounds may be as impracticable to find sometimes as five or ten thousand."

"Better find it than that he should be locked up," said Hopper. "How would the office get on? Deprive him of the power of management, and it might cost Mr. Channing his place. What use is a man of when he is in prison? I was in Mr. Channing's office for ten years, Mr. Arthur, and I know every trick and turn in it, though I have left it a good while. And now that I have just said this, I'll go on; and mind you tell him."

"Thank you," warmly replied Arthur.

"And when you have told him, please to forget that you have heard it. There's somebody's eyes peering at me over the deanery blinds. They may peer! I don't mind them; deaneries don't trouble themselves with sheriffs' officers."

He glided away, and Arthur went straight to the office. Hamish was alone; he was seated at Jenkins's desk writing a note.

"You here still, Hamish! Where's Yorke?"

"Echo answers where," replied Hamish, who appeared to have recovered his full flow of spirits. "I have seen nothing of him."

"That's Yorke all over! It is too bad."

"It would be were this a busy afternoon with me. But what brings you back, Mr. Arthur? Have you left the organ to play itself?"

"Williams is taking it. He heard of Jenkins's accident, and thought I might not be able to get away from the office twice to-day, so he attended himself."

"Come, that's good-natured of Williams! A bargain's a bargain; and having made the bargain, of course it is your own lookout that you fulfil it. Yes, it was considerate of Williams."

"Considerate for himself," said Arthur. "He did not come down to give me holiday, but in the fear lest Mr. Galloway should prevent my attending. 'A pretty thing it would have been,' he said to me, 'had there been no organist this afternoon; it might have cost me my place.'"

"Moonshine!" said Hamish. "It might have cost him a word of reprimand, nothing more."

"Helstonleigh's dean is a strict one, remember. I told Williams he might always depend upon me."

" What should you have done, pray, had I not been here to turn office-keeper ? " laughed Hamish.

" Of the two duties I must have obeyed the most important one. I should have locked the office up and given the key to the housekeeper till college was over or till Yorke returned. He deserves something for this move. Has any one called ? "

" No. Arthur, I have been making free with a sheet of paper and an envelope," said Hamish, completing the note he was writing. " I suppose I am welcome to it ? "

" To ten, if you want them," returned Arthur. " To whom are you writing ? "

" As if I should put you *au courant* of my love-letters ! " gaily answered Hamish.

How could Hamish indulge in this careless gaiety with the sword hanging over his head ? It was verily a puzzle to Arthur. A light, sunny nature was Hamish Channing's. This sobering blow which had fallen on it had probably not come before it was needed. Had his bark been sailing in waters perpetually smooth, he might have wasted his life, indolently basking on the calm, seductive waves. But the storm rose, the waves ran high, threatening to engulf him, and Hamish knew that his best energies must be put forth to surmount them. Never, never talk of troubles as dark, unmitigated evils : to the God-fearing, the God-trusting, they are fraught with hidden love.

" Hamish, were I threatened with evil, as you are, I could not be otherwise than oppressed and serious."

" Where would be the use of that ? " cried gay Hamish. " Care killed a cat. Look here, Arthur, you and your grave face ! Did you ever know care do a fellow good ? I never did ; but a great deal of harm. I shall manage to scramble out of my pit somehow. You'll see." He put the note in his pocket as he spoke, and took up his hat to depart.

" Stop an instant longer, Hamish. I have just met Hopper."

" He did not convert you into a writ-server, I hope. I don't think it would be a legal service."

" There you are, making joke of it again ! Hamish, he has the writ, but he does not wish to serve it. You are to keep out of his way, he says, and he will not seek to put himself in yours. My father was kind to him in days gone by, and he remembers it now."

"He's a regular trump! I'll send him half a crown in a parcel," exclaimed Hamish.

"I wish you would hear me out. He says a ten-pound note, perhaps a five-pound note, paid on account, would induce 'his people'—I suppose you understand the phrase—to stay proceedings and to give you time. He strongly advises it to be done. That's all."

Not only all Arthur had to say upon the point, but all he had time to say. At that moment the barouche of Lady Augusta Yorke drove up to the door, and they both went out to it. Lady Augusta, her daughter Fanny, and Constance Channing were in it. She was on her way to attend a missionary meeting at the Guildhall, and had come to take up Roland, that he might escort her into the room.

"Roland is not to be found, Lady Augusta," said Hamish, raising his hat with one of his sunny smiles. "He darted off, it is impossible to say where, thereby making me a prisoner. My brother had to attend the cathedral, and there was nobody to keep office."

"Then I think I must also make a prisoner of you, Mr. Hamish Channing," graciously said Lady Augusta. "Will you accompany us?"

Hamish shook his head. "I wish I could; but I have already wasted more time than I ought to have done."

"It will not cost you five minutes more," urged Lady Augusta. "You shall only just take us into the hall; I will release you then, if you must be released. Three ladies never can go in alone. Fancy how we should get stared at!"

Constance bent her pretty face forward. "Do, Hamish, if you can!"

He suffered himself to be persuaded, stepped into the barouche, and took his seat by Lady Augusta. As they drove away Arthur thought the greatest ornament the carriage contained had been added to it in handsome Hamish.

A full hour Arthur worked on at his deeds and leases, and Yorke never returned. Mr. Galloway came in then. "Where's Yorke?" was his first question.

Arthur replied that he did not know; he had "stepped out" somewhere. Arthur Channing was not one to make mischief or get another into trouble. Mr. Galloway asked no further; he probably inferred that Yorke had but just gone. He sat down at Jenkins's desk and began to read over a lease.

"Can I have the stamps, sir, for this deed?" Arthur presently asked.

"They are not ready. Are the letters gone to the post?"

"Not yet, sir."

"You can take them now, then. And, Arthur, suppose you step in as you return and see how Jenkins is."

"Very well, sir." He went into Mr. Galloway's room and brought forth the three letters from the rack. "Is this one not to be sealed?" he inquired of Mr. Galloway, indicating the one directed to Ventnor, for it was Mr. Galloway's invariable custom to seal letters which contained money, after they had been fastened down with the gum. "It is a double surety," he would say.

"Ay, to be sure," replied Mr. Galloway. "I went off in a hurry and did not do it. Bring me the wax."

Arthur handed him the sealing-wax and a light. Mr. Galloway sealed the letter, stamping it with the seal hanging to his watch-chain. He then held out his hand for another of the letters, and sealed that. "And this one also?" inquired Arthur, holding out the third.

"No. You can take them now."

Arthur departed. A few paces from the door he met Roland Yorke, coming along in a white heat.

"Channing, I could not help it—I could not, upon my honour. I had to go somewhere with Knivett, and we were kept till now. Galloway's in an awful rage, I suppose?"

"He has only just come in. You had no right to play me this trick, Yorke. But for Hamish being there, I must have locked up the office. Don't you do it again, or Mr. Galloway may get to hear of it."

"It is all owing to that confounded Jenkins!" flashed Roland. "Why did he go and get his head smashed? You are a good fellow, Arthur. I'll do you a neighbourly turn some time."

He sped into the office, and Arthur walked to the post with the letters. Coming back, he turned into Mrs. Jenkins's shop in the High Street.

Mrs. Jenkins was behind the counter. "Oh, go up! go up and see him!" she cried in a tone of suppressed passion. "His bedroom's front, up the two-pair flight, and I'll take my affidavit that there have been fifty folks here this day to see him if there has been one. I could sow a peck of peas on the stairs! You'll find other company up there."

Arthur groped his way up the stairs; they were dark to his sight, coming in from the garish sunshine. He found the room indicated, and entered. Jenkins lay in his bed, his bandaged head upon the pillow; and seated by his side, his apron falling, and his clerical hat held between his knees, was the Bishop of Helstonleigh.

CHAPTER XV.

A SPLASH IN THE RIVER.

AMONGST other received facts, patent to common and uncommon sense, is the very obvious one, that a man cannot be in two places at once. Many a prisoner, accused wrongfully, has made clear his innocence and saved his life by proving this: if he were in one place, he could not have been in another, establishing what is called an *alibi*. In like manner, no author that I ever heard of was able to relate two different portions of his narrative at one and the same time. Thus you will readily understand that if I devoted last week's paper to Mr. Galloway, his clerks and their concerns generally, it could not be given to Mr. Ketch and *his* concerns; although in the strict order of time and precedence the latter gentleman might have claimed an equal if not a premier right.

Mr. Ketch stood in his lodge, his body leaning for support upon the shut-up press-bedstead, which by day looked like a high chest of drawers with brass handles, and his eyes fixed on the keys hanging on the nail opposite to him. His state of mind may be best expressed by the strong epithet "savage." Mr. Ketch had not a pleasant-looking face at the best of times: it was green and withered; and his small, bright eyes were always dropping water; and the two or three locks of hair which he still possessed were of faded yellow, and stood out, solitary and stiff, after the manner of those pictures you have seen of heathens, who decorate their heads with three upright tails. At this moment his countenance looked particularly unpleasant.

Mr. Ketch had spent part of the night and the whole of this morning revolving the previous evening's affair of the cloisters. The more he thought of it the less he liked it, and the surer grew his conviction that the evil had been the work of his enemies, the college boys.

"It's as safe as day," he wrathfully soliloquized. "There be the right keys," nodding to the hanging two, "and there be the wrong ones," nodding towards an old knife-tray, into which he had angrily thrown the rusty keys upon entering his lodge the last night, accompanied by the crowd. "They meant to lock me up all night in the cloisters, the wicked cannibals! I hope the dean'll expel 'em! I'll make my complaint to the headmaster, I will! Drat all college schools! there's never no good done in 'em!"

"How are you this morning, Ketch?"

The salutation proceeded from Stephen Bywater, who, in the boisterous manner peculiar to himself and his tribe, had flung open the door without the ceremony of knocking.

"I'm none the better for seeing you," growled Ketch.

"You need not be uncivil," returned Bywater, with great suavity. "I am only making a morning call upon you, as is the fashion among gentlefolks; the public delights to pay respect to its officials, you know. How *do* you feel after that mishap last night? We can't think, any of us, however you came to make the mistake."

"I'll 'mistake' you!" shrieked Ketch. "I kep' a nasty, old, rusty brace o' keys in my lodge to take out instead o' the right ones, didn't I?"

"How uncommon stupid it was of you to do so!" said Bywater, pretending to take the remark literally. "*I* would not keep a duplicate pair of keys by me; I should make sure they'd bring me to grief. What do you say? You did *not* keep duplicate keys; they were false ones! Why, that's just what we all told you last night. The bishop told it you. He said he knew you had made a mistake, and taken out the wrong keys for the right. My belief is, that you went out without any keys at all. You left them hanging upon the nail, and you found them there. You had not got a second pair!"

"You just wait!" raved old Ketch. "I'm a-coming round to the headmaster, and I'll bring the keys with me. He'll let you boys know whether there's two pairs or one. Horrid old rusty things they be—as rusty as you!"

"Who says they are rusty?"

"Who says it! They *be* rusty!" shrieked the old man. "You'd like to get me into a madhouse, you boys would, a-worrying of me! I'll show you whether they be rusty!

I'll show you whether there's a second brace o' keys or not! I'll show 'em to the headmaster! I'll show 'em to the dean! I'll show 'em again to his lordship the bi—— What's gone of the keys?"

The last sentence was uttered in a different tone and in apparent perplexity. With shaking hands, excited by passion, Mr. Ketch was rummaging in the knife-box—an old, deep tray of mahogany, dark with age, divided by a partition—rummaging for the rusty keys. He could not find them. He searched on this side, he searched on that; he pulled out the contents, one by one: a black-handled knife, a white-handled fork, a green-handled knife with a broken point, and a brown-handled fork with one prong, which comprised his household cutlery; a small whetstone, a comb and a blacking-brush, a gimlet, and a small hammer, some leather shoe-strings, three or four tallow candles, a match-box, and an extinguisher, the key of his door, the bolt of his casement window, and a few other miscellanies. He could not come upon the false keys, and finally he made a snatch at the tray and turned it upside down. The keys were not there.

When he had fully taken in the fact—which cost him some little time to do—he turned his anger upon Bywater.

"You have took 'em, you have! you have turned thief and stole 'em! I put 'em here in the knife-box, and they are gone! What have you done with 'em?"

"Come, that's good!" exclaimed Bywater in too genuine a tone to admit a suspicion of its truth. "I have not been near your knife-box; I have not put my foot inside the door."

In point of fact, Bywater had not. He had stood outside, bending his head and body inwards, his hands grasping either doorpost.

"What's gone with 'em? who has took 'em off? I'll swear I put 'em there, and I have never looked at 'em nor touched 'em since! There's a infamous conspiracy a-forming again me! I'm a-going to be blowed up, like Guy Fawkes!"

"If you did put them there—'*if*,' you know—some of your friends must have taken them," cried Bywater in a tone midway between reason and irony.

"There haven't a soul been a-nigh the place," shrieked Ketch—"except the milk, and he gave me my ha'porth through the winder."

"Hurrah!" said Bywater, throwing up his trencher. "It's a clear case of dreams. You dreamt you had a second pair of keys, Ketch, and couldn't get rid of the impression on awaking. Mr. Ketch, D.H., Dreamer-in-chief to Helstonleigh!"

Bywater commenced a dance of aggravation. Ketch was aggravated sufficiently without it. "What d'ye call me?" he asked in a state of concentrated temper that turned his face livid. "'D?' What d'ye mean by 'D'? D stands for that bad sperit as is too near to you college boys; he's among you always, like a ranging lion. It's like your impedence to call me by his name."

"My dear Mr. Ketch, call *you* by his name! I never thought of such a thing," politely retorted Bywater. "You are not promoted to that honour yet. D.H. stands for Deputy Hangman. Isn't it affixed to the cathedral roll, kept amid the archives in the chapter-house—'John Ketch, D.H., porter to the cloisters'? I hope you don't omit the distinguishing initials when you sign your letters."

Ketch foamed. Bywater danced. The former could not find words. The latter found plenty.

"I say, though, Mr. Calcraft, don't you make a similar mistake when you are going on public duty. If you were to go *there*, dreaming you had got the right apparatus, and found, in the last critical moment, that you had brought the wrong, you don't know what the consequences might be. The real victim might escape, rescued by the enraged crowd, and they might put the nightcap upon you, and operate upon you instead! So be careful. We couldn't afford to lose you. Only think, what a lot of money it would cost to put the college into mourning!"

Ketch gave a great gasp of agony, threw an iron ladle at his tormentor, which, falling short of its aim, came clanking down on the red brick floor, and banged the door in Bywater's face. Bywater withdrew to a short distance, under cover of the cathedral wall, and bent his body backwards and forwards with the violence of his laughter, unconscious that the Bishop of Helstonleigh was standing near, surveying him with an exceedingly amused expression. His lordship had been an ear-witness to part of the colloquy, very much to his edification.

"What is your mirth, Bywater?"

Bywater drew himself straight, and turned round as if he had been shot. "I was only laughing, my lord," he said, touching his trencher.

"I see you were. You will lose your breath entirely some day if you laugh in that violent manner. What were you and Ketch quarrelling about?"

"We were not quarrelling, my lord. I was only chaff—teasing him," rejoined Bywater, substituting one word for another, as if fearing the first might not altogether be suitable to the bishop's ears, "and Ketch got into a passion."

"As he often does, I fear," remarked his lordship. "I fancy you boys provoke him unjustifiably."

"My lord," said Bywater, turning his red, impudent, but honest face full upon the prelate, "I don't deny that we do provoke him; but you can have no idea what an awful tyrant he is to us. I can't believe anybody was ever born with such a cross-grained temper. He vents it upon everybody—not only upon the college boys, but upon all who come in his way. If your lordship were not the bishop," added bold Bywater, "he would vent it upon you."

"Would he?" said the bishop, who was a dear lover of candour, and would have excused a whole bushel of mischief rather than one little grain of falsehood.

"Not a day passes but he sets upon us with his tongue. He would keep us out of the cloisters; he would keep us out of our own schoolroom. He goes to the headmaster with the most unfounded cram—stories, and when the master declines to notice them (for he knows Ketch of old), then he goes presumingly to the dean. If he let us alone, we should let him alone. I am not speaking this in the light of a complaint to your lordship," Bywater added, throwing his head back. "I don't want to get him into a row, tyrant though he is; and the college boys can hold their own against Ketch."

"I expect they can," significantly replied the bishop. "He would keep you out of the cloisters, would he?"

"It is what he is aiming at," returned Bywater. "There never would have been a word said about our playing there but for him. If the dean shuts us out, it will be Ketch's doings. The college boys have played in the cloisters since the school was founded."

"He would keep you out of the cloisters; so, by way of retaliation, you lock him in them—an uncomfortable abiding place for a night, Bywater."

"My lord!" cried Bywater.

"Sir!" responded his lordship.

"Does your lordship think it was I who played that trick to Ketch?"

"Yes I do—speaking of you conjointly with the school."

Bywater's eyes and his good-humoured countenance fell before the steady gaze of the prelate. But in the gaze there was an earnest—if Bywater could read it aright—of good feeling, of excuse for the mischief, rather than of punishment in store. The boy's face was red enough at all times, but it turned to scarlet now. If the bishop had suspected previously the share played in the affair by the college boys, it had by this time been converted into a certainty.

"Boy," said he, "confess it if you like, be silent if you like; but do not tell me a lie."

Bywater rose his face again. His free, fearless eyes—free in the cause of daring, but fearless in that of truth—looked straight into those of the bishop. "I never do tell lies," he answered. "There's not a boy in the school punished oftener than I am—and I don't say but I mostly deserve it—but it never is for telling a lie. If I did tell them, I should slide out of many a scrape that I get punished for now."

The bishop could read truth as well as anybody—better than some—and he saw that it was being told to him. "Which of you must be punished for this trick as ringleader?" he asked.

"I, my lord, if any one must," frankly avowed Bywater. "We should have let him out at ten o'clock. We never meant to keep him there all night. If I am punished, I hope your lordship will be so kind as allow it to be put down to your own account, not to Ketch's. I should not like it to be thought that I caught it for *him*. I heartily beg your pardon, my lord, for having been so unfortunate as to include you in the locking-up. We are all as sorry as can be that it should have happened. I am ready to take any punishment for that that you may order me."

"Ah!" said the bishop, "had you known that I was in the cloisters, your friend Ketch would have come off scot-free!"

"Yes, that he would, until——"

"Until what?" asked the bishop, for Bywater had brought his words to a sudden standstill.

"Until a more convenient night, I was going to say, my lord."

"Well, that's candid," said the bishop. "Bywater," he gravely added, "you have spoken the truth to me freely. Had you equivocated in the slightest degree, I should have punished you for the equivocation. As it is, I shall look upon this as a confidential communication, and *not* order you punishment. But we will not have any more tricks played at locking Ketch up. You understand ?"

"All right, my lord. Thank you a hundred times."

Bywater, touching his trencher, leaped off. The bishop turned to enter his palace gates, which were close by, and encountered Ketch talking to the headmaster. The latter had been passing the lodge when he was seen and pounced upon by Ketch, who thought it a good opportunity to make his complaint.

"I am as morally sure it was them, sir, as I am that I be alive," he was saying when the bishop came up. "And I don't know who they has dealings with ; but for certain they have sperited away them rusty keys what did the mischief, without so much as putting one o' their noses inside my lodge. I put 'em safe in the knife-box last night, and they be gone this morning. I hope, sir, you'll punish them as they deserve. I am nothing, of course. If they had locked me up, and kept me there till I was worn to a skeleton's bones when found, it might be thought light of ; but his lordship the bishop"—bowing sideways to the prelate—"was a sufferer by their wickedness."

"To be sure I was," said the bishop in a grave tone, but with a twinkle in his eye ; "and therefore the complaint to Mr. Pye must be preferred by me, Ketch.—We will talk of it when I have leisure," he added to Mr. Pye, with a pleasant nod as he went through the palace gates.

The headmaster bowed to the bishop and walked away, leaving Ketch on the growl.

Meanwhile Bywater, flying through the cloisters, came upon Hurst and two or three more of the conspirators. The time was between nine and ten. The boys had been home for breakfast after early school, and were now reassembling, but they did not go into school until a quarter before ten o'clock.

"He is such a glorious old trump that bishop !" burst forth Bywater. "He knows all about it, and he is not going to put us up for punishment. Let's cut round to the palace gates and cheer him."

"Knows that it was us!" echoed the boys, startled. "How did it come out to him?" asked Hurst.

"He guessed it, I think," said Bywater, "and he taxed me with it downright. So I couldn't help myself, and told him I'd take the punishment; and he said he'd excuse us, but there was to be no locking up of Mr. Calcraft again. I'll lay a hundred guineas the bishop went in for scrapes himself when he was a boy! I'll be bound he thinks we only served the fellow right. Hurrah for the bishop!"

"Hurrah for the bishop!" shouted Hurst, with the other chorus of voices. "Long life to him! He's made of the right sort of stuff! I say, though, Jenkins is the worst," added Hurst, his note changing. "My father says he doesn't know but what brain fever will come on."

"Moonshine!" laughed the boys.

"Upon my word and honour it is not. He pitched right upon his head; it might have cost him his life had he fallen upon the edge of the stone step, but they think he alighted flat. My father was round with him this morning at six o'clock."

"Does your father know about it?"

"Not he. What next?" cried Hurst. "Should I stand before him and take my trencher off, with a bow, and say, 'If you please, dear father, it was the college boys who served out old Ketch'? That would be a nice joke! He said at breakfast this morning that that fumbling old Ketch must have got hold of the wrong keys. 'Of course, sir!' answered I."

"Oh, what do you think, though?" interrupted Bywater. "Ketch can't find the keys. He put them in a knife-box, he says, and this morning they are gone. He intended to take them round to Pye, and I left him going rampant over the loss. Didn't I chaff him?"

Hurst laughed. He unbuttoned the pocket of his trousers and partially exhibited two rusty keys. "I was not going to leave them to Ketch for witnesses," said he. "I saw him throw them into the tray last night, and I walked them out again while he was talking to the crowd."

"I say, Hurst, don't be such a ninny as to keep them about you!" exclaimed Berkeley in a fright. "Suppose Pye should go in for a search this morning, and visit our pockets? You'd floor us at once!"

"The truth is, I don't know where to put them," ingenuously acknowledged Hurst. "If I hid them at home, they'd get found; if I dropped them in the street, some hullabaloo might arise from it."

"Let's carry them back to the old-iron shop, and get the fellow to retake them at half the price we gave!"

"Catch him doing that! Besides, the trick is sure to get wind in the town; he might be capable of coming forward and declaring that we bought the keys at his shop!"

"Let's throw 'em down old Pye's well!"

"They'd come up again in the bucket, like ghosts do!"

"Couldn't we make a railway parcel of them, and direct it to 'Mr. Smith, London'?"

"'Two pounds to pay; to be kept till called for,'" added Mark Galloway, improving upon the suggestion. "They'd put it in their fireproof safe, and it would never come out again."

"Dash them into the river," said Stephen Bywater; "that's the only safe place; they'd lie at the bottom for ever. We have got time to do it now. Come along."

Acting promptly upon the impulse, as schoolboys usually do, they went galloping out of the cloisters, running against the headmaster, who was entering then, and nearly overturning his equilibrium. He gave them an angry word of caution; they touched their caps in reply, and somewhat slackened their speed, resuming the gallop when he was beyond hearing.

Inclosing the cathedral and its precincts on the western side was a wall, built of red stone. It was only breast high, standing on this side, the cathedral side; but on the other it descended several feet to the broad path which ran along the banks of the river. The boys made for this wall, and gained it, their faces hot and their breath gone.

"Who'll pitch 'em in?" cried Hurst, who did not altogether relish being chief actor himself, for windows looked on that particular spot from various angles and corners of the Boundaries. "You shall do it, Galloway!"

"Oh, shall I, though!" returned young Galloway, not relishing it either.

"You precious rebel! Take the keys, and do as I order you!"

Young Galloway was under Hurst. He no more dared to disobey him than he could have disobeyed the headmaster. Had Hurst ordered him to jump into the river, he must have done it. He took the keys tendered him by Hurst, and was raising them for the pitch when Bywater laid his hand upon them and struck them down with a sudden movement, clutching them to him.

"You little wretch, you are as deaf as a donkey!" he uttered. "There's somebody coming up. Turn your head and look who it is."

It proved to be Fordham, the dean's servant. He was but accidentally passing. The boys did not fear him; nevertheless, it was only prudent to remain still until he had gone. They stood, all the five, leaning upon the wall, soiling their waistcoats and the sleeves of their jackets, in apparent contemplation of the view beyond. A pleasant view! The river wound peacefully along between its green banks; meadows and cornfields were stretched out beyond; while an opening afforded a glimpse of that lovely chain of hills, their tops touching the blue sky, and the white houses nestled at their base. A barge, drawn by a horse, was appearing slowly from underneath the city bridge, blue smoke ascending from its chimney. A woman on board was hanging out linen to dry—a shirt, a pair of stockings, and a handkerchief—her husband's change for the coming Sunday. A young girl was scraping potatoes beside her; and a man, probably the husband, sat steering, his pipe in his mouth. The boys fixed their eyes upon the boat.

"I shouldn't mind such a life as that fellow's yonder!" exclaimed young Berkeley, who was fonder of idleness than he was of Latin. "I'll turn bargeman if other trades fail. It must be rather jolly to sit steering a boat all day, and do nothing but smoke."

"Fordham's gone, and be hanged to him! Now for it, Galloway!"

"Stop a bit," said Bywater. "They must be wrapped up, or else tied close together. Better wrap them up, and then no matter who sees. They can't swear there are keys inside. Who has got any paper?"

One of the boys, Hall, had his exercise-book with him. They tore a sheet or two out of it, and folded it round the keys, Hurst producing some string.

"I'll be flinger," said Bywater.

"Make haste, then, or we shall have to wait till the barge has gone by."

Bywater took a cautious look round, saw nobody, and flung the parcel into the middle of the river. "*Rari nantes in gurgite vasto!*" ejaculated he.

"Now, you gents, what be you a-throwing into the river?"

The words came from Hudson, the porter to the Boundaries, who appeared to have sprung up from the ground. In reality, he had been standing on the steps leading to the river, but the boathouse had hid him from their view. He was a very different man from the cloister porter, was afraid of the college boys rather than otherwise, and addressed them individually as "sir." The keeper of the boathouse heard this, and came up the steps.

"If you gentlemen have been a-throwing anything into the river, you know that it's against the rules."

"Don't bother!" returned Hurst to the keeper.

"But you know it *is* wrong, gentlemen," remonstrated the keeper. "What was it you throwed in? It made a dreadful splash."

"Ah! what was it?" coolly answered Hurst. "What should you say to a dead cat?—Hudson, have the goodness to mind *your* business, unless you would like to get reported for interfering with what does not concern you."

"There's a quarter to ten!" exclaimed Bywater, as the college clock chimed the three-quarters. "We shall be marked late, every soul of us!"

They flew away, their feet scarcely touching the ground, clattered up the schoolroom stairs, and took their places. Gaunt was only beginning to call over the roll, and they escaped the "late" mark.

"It's better to be born lucky than rich," said saucy Bywater.

CHAPTER XVI.

MUCH TO ALTER.

At the same moment Constance Channing was traversing the Boundaries on her way to the house of Lady Augusta Yorke, where she had, some days since, commenced her duties. It took her scarcely two minutes to get there, for the houses were nearly within view of each other. Constance would willingly have commenced the daily routine at an earlier hour. Lady Augusta freely confessed that to come earlier would be useless, for she could not get her daughters up. Strictly speaking, Lady Augusta did not try personally to get them up, for she generally lay in bed herself. "That is one of the habits I must alter in the children," thought Constance.

She entered, took off her things in the room appropriated, and passed into the schoolroom. It was empty, though the children ought to have been there, preparing their lessons. Fanny came running in, her hair a mass of curl-papers, and her mouth full of bread and butter.

"Carry has not finished her breakfast, Miss Channing," quoth she. "She was lazy this morning!"

"I think somebody else was lazy also," said Constance, gently drawing the child to her. "Why did you come down half dressed, my dear?"

"I am whole dressed," responded Fanny. "My frock's on, and my pinafore."

"And these?" said Constance, touching the curl-papers.

"Oh, Martha got up too late, and said she had no time to take them out. It will keep in curl all the better, Miss Channing; and perhaps I am going to the missionary meeting with mamma."

Constance rang the bell. Martha, who was the only maid kept, except the cook, appeared in answer to it. Lady Augusta was wont to say that she had too much expense with her boys to keep many servants; and the argument was true.

"Be so kind as to take the papers out of Miss Fanny's hair. And let it be done in future, Martha, before she comes to me."

Gently as the words were spoken, there was no mistaking that the tone was one of authority, and not to be trifled with. Martha withdrew with the child. And, just then, Caroline came in, full of eagerness.

"Miss Channing, mamma says she shall take one of us to the missionary meeting, whichever you choose to fix upon. Mind you fix upon me! What does that little chit, Fanny, want at a missionary meeting? She is too young."

"It is expected to be a very interesting meeting," observed Constance, making no reply to Miss Caroline's special request. "A gentleman who has lived for some years amongst the poor heathens is to give a history of his personal experiences. Some of the anecdotes are beautiful."

"Who told you they were?" asked Caroline.

"Mr. Yorke," replied Constance, a pretty blush rising to her cheek. "He knows the gentleman well. You would be pleased to hear them."

"It is not for that I wish to go," said Caroline. "I think meetings, where there's nothing but talking, are the dullest things in the world. If I were to listen, it would send me to sleep."

"Then why do you wish so much to attend this one?"

"Because I shall wear my new dress. I have not had it on yet. It rained last Sunday, and mamma would not let me put it on for college. I was in such a passion."

Constance wondered where she should begin. There was so much to do—so much to alter in so many ways. To set to work abruptly would never answer. It must be commenced gradually, almost imperceptibly, little by little.

"Caroline, do you know that you have disobeyed me?"

"In what way, Miss Channing?"

"Did I not request you to have that exercise written?"

"I know," said Caroline, with some contrition. "I intended to write it this morning before you came; but somehow I lay in bed."

"If I were to come to you every morning at seven o'clock, would you undertake to get up and be ready for me?" asked Constance.

Caroline drew a long face. She did not speak.

"My dear, you are fifteen."

"Well?" responded Caroline.

"And you must not feel hurt if I tell you that I should think no other young lady of that age and in your position is half so deficient as you are. Deficient in many ways, Caroline — in goodness, in thoughtfulness, and in other desirable qualities; and greatly so in education. Annabel, who is a year younger than you, is twice as far advanced."

"Annabel says you worry her into learning."

"Annabel is fond of talking nonsense; but she is a good, loving child at heart. You would be surprised at the little trouble she really gives me while she makes a show of giving me a great deal. I have *so much* to teach you, Caroline—to your mind and heart, as well as to your intellect—that I feel the hours, as at present arranged, will be insufficient. My dear, when you grow up a woman, I am sure you will wish to be a loving and a loved one."

Caroline burst into tears. "I should do better if mamma were not so cross with me, Miss Channing. I always do anything that William Yorke asks me; and I will do anything for you."

Constance kissed her. "Then you will begin by rising early, and being ready for me at seven?"

"Yes, I will," answered Caroline. "But Martha must be sure to call me. Are you going to the meeting this afternoon?"

"Of course not," said Constance. "My time now belongs to you."

"But I think mamma wishes you to go with us. She said something about it."

"Does she? I should very much like to go."

Lady Augusta came in and proffered the invitation to Constance to accompany them. Constance then spoke of giving the children the extra two hours, from seven to nine: it was really necessary, she said, if she was to do her duty by them.

"How very conscientious you are!" laughed Lady Augusta, her tone savouring of ridicule.

Constance coloured almost to tears with her emotion. "I am responsible to One, always, Lady Augusta. I may not make mine only eye-service."

"You never will put up with our scrambling breakfast, Miss Channing. The boys are so unruly; and I do not get up to it half my time."

"I will go home to breakfast. I should prefer it. And be here again at ten."

"Whatever time do you get up?"

"Not very early," smiled Constance. "Hitherto I have risen at seven, summer and winter. Dressing and reading take me just an hour: the other hour I find plenty of occupation for. We do not breakfast until nine, on account of Tom and Charley. I shall rise at six now, and come here at seven."

"Very well," said Lady Augusta. "I suppose this will only apply to the summer months. One of the girls shall go with us to-day—whichever shall deserve it best."

"You are not leaving one of them at home to make room for me, I hope, Lady Augusta?"

"Not at all," answered Lady Augusta. "I never *chaperone* two children to a crowded meeting. People might say they took up the room of grown persons."

"You will let me go—not Caroline, Miss Channing?" pleaded Fanny when her mother quitted them.

"No," said Caroline sharply. "Miss Channing will fix upon me."

"I shall obey Lady Augusta and decide upon the one who shall best merit it," smiled Constance. "It will be only right to do so."

"Suppose we are both good, and merit it equally?" suggested Fanny.

"Then, my dear little girl, you must not be disappointed if, in that case, I give the privilege to Caroline, as being the elder of the two. But I will make it up to you in some other way."

Alas for the resolution of poor Caroline! For a short while, an hour or so, she did strive to do her best; but then the good resolves were forgotten, and idleness supervened. Not only idleness; temper also. Never had she been so troublesome to Constance as on this day; she even forgot herself so far as to be insolent. Fanny was taken to the town hall meeting—you saw her in the carriage when Lady Augusta drove to Mr. Galloway's office, and persuaded Hamish to join them—Caroline was left at home, in a state of open rebellion, with the lessons to learn which she had *not* learnt in the day.

"How shall you get on with them, Constance?" the Reverend Mr. Yorke inquired of her that same evening. "Have the weeds destroyed the good seed?"

"Not quite destroyed it," replied Constance, though she sighed sadly as she spoke, as if nearly losing heart for the task she had undertaken. "There is so much ill to undo. Caroline is the worst; the weeds with her have had longer time to get ahead. I think, perhaps, if I could keep her wholly with me for a twelvemonth or so, watching over her constantly, a great deal might be effected."

"If that anticipated living would fall, which seems very far away in the clouds, and you were wholly mine, we might have Caroline with us for a time," laughed Mr. Yorke.

Constance laughed too. "Do not be impatient, or it will seem to be farther off still. It will come, William."

They had been speaking in an undertone, standing together at a window, apart from the rest. Mr. Channing was lying on his sofa, underneath the other window, and now spoke to Mr. Yorke.

"You had a treat, I hear, at the meeting to-day?"

"We had, indeed, sir," replied Mr. Yorke, advancing to take a seat near him. "It is not often we have the privilege of listening to so eloquent a speaker as Dr. Lamb. His experience is great, and his whole heart was in his subject. I should like to bring him here to call upon you."

"I should be pleased to receive him," replied Mr. Channing.

"I think it is possible that his experience in another line may be of suggestive service to you," continued Mr. Yorke. "You are aware that it was ill-health drove him home?"

"I have heard so."

"His complaint was rheumatism—very much, as I fancy, the same kind of rheumatism that afflicts you. He told me he came to Europe with but little hope; he feared his complaint had become chronic and incurable. But he has been restored in a wonderful manner, and is sound and healthy again."

"And what remedies did he use?" eagerly asked Mr. Channing.

"A three months' residence at some medicinal springs in Germany. Nothing else. When I say nothing else, of course, I must imply that he was under medical treatment and supervision there. It is the same thing, you see, sir, that has been ordered for you."

"Ay!" sighed Mr. Channing, feeling how very faint appeared to be the hope that he should have the opportunity of trying it.

"I was mentioning your case to him," observed Mr. Yorke. "He said he had no doubt the baths would do you an equal good. He is a doctor, you know. I will bring him here to talk it over with you."

At that moment Mr. Galloway entered, and the subject was continued. Mr. Yorke and Mr. Galloway were eloquent in it, telling Mr. Channing that he *must* get to Germany, as a point of duty. The Channings themselves were silent; they could not see the way at all clear. When Mr. Yorke was leaving, he beckoned Constance and Arthur into the hall.

"Mr. Channing must go," he whispered to them. "Think of the stake—renewed health, renewed exertion, renewed happiness! Arthur, you did not urge it by a single hopeful word."

Arthur did not feel hopeful; indeed, his heart sank within him the whole time that they were talking. Hamish and his difficulties were the dark grief, though he could not tell this to Mr. Yorke. Were Mr. Channing to go abroad, and the arrest of Hamish to supervene upon it, the post they held and its emoluments might be taken from them at once and for ever.

"Dr. Lamb says the cost was so trifling as scarcely to be credited," continued Mr. Yorke, in a tone of remonstrance. "Arthur, *don't* you care to help—to save him?"

"I would move heaven and earth to save my father!" impulsively spoke Arthur, stung by the implied reproof. "I should not care what labour it cost me to get the money, so that I did get it."

"We all would," said Constance; "you must know we would, William—from Hamish downwards."

"Who is that making free with Hamish's name?" demanded that gentleman himself, entering the house with a free step and merry countenance. "Did you think I was lost? I got seduced into joining your missionary-meeting people, and have had to stop at the office late, to make up for it."

"We have been talking about papa, Hamish," said Constance. "Fresh hope seems to arise daily that those German baths would restore him. They have cured Dr. Lamb."

"I say, Hamish, that the money must be found for it somehow," added Mr. Yorke.

"Found! of course it shall be found," cried gay Hamish. "I intend to be a chief contributor to it myself." But his joking words and careless manner jarred at that moment upon the spirit both of Arthur and Constance Channing.

Why? Could there have been any unconscious foreshadowing of unseen evil to come?

CHAPTER XVII.

SUNDAY MORNING AT MR. CHANNING'S AND AT LADY AUGUSTA'S.

THE day of rest came round in due course. A day of rest it is in truth to those who have learnt to make it such, a pleasant time of peace, a privileged season of commune with God, a loving day of social happiness for home and home ties. And yet, strange to say, it is to some the most scuffling, uncomfortable, disagreeable day of all the seven.

Mrs. Channing's breakfast hour was nine o'clock on ordinary days, made thus late for convenience' sake. On Sundays it was half-past eight. Discipline and training had rendered rules easy to be observed at Mr. Channing's; or, it may be better to say, it had rendered them difficult to be disobeyed. At half-past eight all were in the breakfast-room, dressed for the day. When the hour for divine service should arrive, they had but to put on their hats and bonnets to be ready for it. Even old Judy was grand on a Sunday morning. Her mobcap was of spotted net, instead of plain; and her check apron was replaced by a white one.

With great personal inconvenience and some pain—for he was always worse in the morning—Mr. Channing would on that day rise to breakfast. It had been his invariable custom to take the reading himself on Sunday—the little while devoted to religion—and he was unwilling to break through it. Breakfast over, it was immediately entered upon, and would be finished by ten o'clock. He did not preach a sermon, he did not give them much reading—it was only a little bit of homely preparation for the day and the services they were about to enter upon. Very unwise it had been of Mr. Channing to tire his children with a private service before the public service began.

Breakfast on these mornings was always a longer meal than usual. There was no necessity to bustle and hurry over it in order to hasten to the various occupations of everyday life. It was taken in leisurely quiet, amidst much pleasant, social converse. Mrs. Channing had many little odds and ends of rules which she had brought her children up to observe, all tending to the better hallowing of that privileged day. For one thing, she had never allowed them to put on new clothes upon the Sunday. The very best of us are but human; and one, to whom God gave great wisdom, has told us that childhood and youth are vanity. When our hair grows gray and our body drooping, then we may be wise enough to begin to put vanity away from us, but in earlier life we no doubt possess our share.

"This new suit of broadcloth home last night from the tailor's—how does it fit me? how does it look, I wonder? Are you who are staring at me admiring the taste I have displayed in the selection? Are you thinking how tall and well my figure appears in it? But the coat is tight under the arms. Bother the fellow! he must alter it to-morrow. I feel like one in a vice."

"Oh, this charming bonnet! I am sure I never had on so becoming a one before! I am so glad I chose it white!—it contrasts so well with this lovely new lilac dress. Let me glance round. There's nobody looking *half* so well as I, I declare! I don't see a single new bonnet or dress out to-day, except mine. What a set of dowdies! Goodness me, though, she has dreadfully pinched my waist in, that dressmaker! I can't breathe. I shall be miserable all day."

Now all this—this self-complacency, self-absorption, self-torture—is very legitimate at times and seasons, for there's no help for it; and all the preaching of all the world could not put such feelings away from the young. In a greater or less degree, they do and must prevail; new things must be donned for the first time, and we must grow accustomed to their fresh aspect—to their misfit. Very good. But Mrs. Channing did not choose that Sunday should be wasted in these idle thoughts: any day in the week, from Monday to Saturday, they might put on their new clothes to get seasoned to them, but not on Sunday. I think the rule was a good one.

As they were assembling for breakfast on this morning, Arthur came in. It was so unusual for them to leave the house early on a Sunday that Mr. Channing looked at him with surprise.

"I have been to see Jenkins, sir," he explained. "In coming home last night I met Mr. Hurst, who told me he feared Jenkins was getting worse. I would not go to see him then—it might have been late to disturb him—so I have been now."

"And how is he?" inquired Mr. Channing.

"A great deal better," replied Arthur—"so much better that Mr. Hurst says he may come to the office to-morrow, should there be no relapse. He enjoins strict quiet for him to-day. And Mrs. Jenkins is determined that he shall have quiet; therefore I am sure he will," Arthur added, laughing. "She says he appeared ill last night only from the number of visitors he had seen. They were coming in all day long, and on the Friday besides."

"Why should people flock to see Jenkins?" exclaimed Tom. "He is nobody."

"That is just what Mrs. Jenkins said this morning," returned Arthur. "I believe they go out of curiosity to hear the truth of the locking-up in the cloisters. The bishop's having been one of the sufferers has aroused the interest of Helstonleigh."

"I am very glad that Jenkins is better," observed Mr. Channing.

"So am I," emphatically answered Arthur. He was pretty sure Tom had had no share in the exploit; but he did not know about Charley.

"The dean preaches to-day," suddenly called out Tom.

"How do you know?" demanded Annabel.

"Because I do," oracularly spoke Tom.

"Will you condescend to inform me how you know it, Tom, if you will not inform Annabel?" asked Mr. Channing.

Tom laughed. "The dean began his close residence yesterday, papa. Therefore we know he will preach to-day."

Mr. Channing sighed. He was debarred from attending the public services, and he felt the deprivation keenly when he found that any particularly eminent man was to fill the cathedral pulpit. The Dean of Helstonleigh was an admirable preacher.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Channing, in the uncontrollable impulse of the moment, "if I could but regain my health and strength!"

"It will come, James, God willing," said Mrs. Channing, looking up hopefully from the cups she was filling. "What I have heard of Dr. Lamb's restoration has put new confidence into me."

"I think Mr. Yorke intends to bring Dr. Lamb to see you this afternoon, papa," said Constance.

"I shall be glad to see him; I shall be glad to hear the particulars of his case and its cure," exclaimed Mr. Channing, with all conscious eagerness. "Did Mr. Yorke tell you he should bring him to-day, Constance?"

"Yes, papa. Dr. Lamb intends to be at the cathedral for afternoon service, and Mr. Yorke said he would bring him here afterwards."

"You must get him to take tea with us, Mary."

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Channing. "In six months from this, James, you may be as well and active as ever."

Mr. Channing raised his hands, as if warding off the words. Not of the words was he afraid, but of the hopes they whispered. "I think too much of it already, Mary. It is not as though I were sure of getting to the medicinal baths."

"We will take care that you do that, sir," said Hamish, with his sunny smile.

"*You* cannot help in it, you know, Hamish," interposed saucy Annabel. "It will be Arthur and Constance who will help—not you. I heard you say so."

"But I have changed my mind, and intend to help," returned Hamish. "And if you will allow me the remark, young lady, I think it would better become a certain little girl not to be quite so free with her tongue!"

Was Hamish speaking in jest or earnest with regard to the *helping* point of the affair? A peculiar tone in his voice, in spite of its lightness, had struck both Constance and Arthur, each being in the secret of his worse than want of funds.

The second bell was beginning to chime as the Channing family entered the cloister gates. Tom and Charles had gone on previously. Panting, breathless, nearly knocking down Annabel, came Tod Yorke, terribly afraid of being marked late.

"Take care, Tod!" exclaimed Hamish. "Are you running for a wager?"

"Don't keep me, Mr. Hamish Channing! Those incapable servants of ours never called us till the bell began. I have had no breakfast, and Gerald couldn't find his shirt. He has had to come in his dirty one, with his waistcoat buttoned up. Won't my lady be in a rage when she sees him?"

Getting up and breakfasting were generally scuffling affairs at Lady Augusta's; but the confusion of every day was as nothing compared to that of Sunday. Master Tod was wrong when he complained that he had not been called. The servants had called both him and Gerald, who shared the same room, but the young gentlemen had gone to sleep again. The hour named for breakfast was the same as other mornings—nine o'clock; but, for all the observance it obtained, they might as well have named nine at night. To give the servants their due, the breakfast on this morning was on the table at nine—that is, the cloth and the cups and saucers—and there it stopped till ten. The maids meanwhile enjoyed their own leisurely breakfast in the kitchen, regaling themselves with hot coffee, poached eggs, buttered toast, and a dish of gossip. At ten Lady Augusta, who made a merit of always rising to breakfast on a Sunday, entered the breakfast parlour in a dirty morning wrapper, and rang the bell.

"Is nobody down?" cried she sharply.

"I think not, my lady," was Martha's reply. "I have not heard them. I have been three times into the young ladies' room, but they would not get out of bed."

This was not quite true. Martha had been in *once*, and had got grumbled at for her pains. "None of them ever will get up on a Sunday morning," added Martha. "They say, 'Where's the good?'"

"Bring in the breakfast," crossly responded Lady Augusta. "And then go up to the young ladies, and see whether the rest are getting up. What has the cook been at with this coffee?" Lady Augusta added, when she came to pour it out. "It is cold. Her coffee is always cold."

"It has been made half an hour, I know, my lady."

The first to appear was the youngest child of all, little Frank; the next, his brother, a year older; they wore dirty collars, and their hair was uncombed. Then came the young ladies—Caroline, without a frock, a shawl thrown on instead; and Fanny in her curl-papers. Lady Augusta scolded them for their late appearance, forgetting, possibly, that she set the example.

"It is not much after ten," said Caroline. "We shall be in time for college."

"It is hard upon half-past," replied Lady Augusta. "Why do you come down in a petticoat, Caroline?"

"That stupid dressmaker has put no tape to my dress in front, and I could not fasten it down," fretfully responded Caroline. "Martha is sewing it on."

Roland lounged in, not more presentable than the rest. Why had Lady Augusta not brought them up to better habits? Why should they come down on a Sunday morning more untidy than on others? They would have told you, had you asked the question, that on other mornings they must be dressed, to hasten to their daily occupations. Ah! Had *Sunday* no occupation then? Did it deserve no marked deference? Had I been Lady Augusta Yorke, I should have said to Roland that morning, when I saw his slipshod slippers and his collarless neck, "If you show no respect for me, show it for the day!"

Half-past ten struck, and Lady Augusta started up to fly to her own room. She had much to do yet, ere she could be presentable for college. Caroline followed. Fanny wondered what Gerald and Tod would do. Not yet down!

"Those boys will get a tanning to-morrow from old Pye!" exclaimed Roland, remembering the time when "tannings" had been his portion for the same fault. "Go and see what they are after, Martha."

They were "after" jumping up in alarm, aroused by the college bell. Amidst wild confusion, for nothing seemed to be at hand, with harsh reproaches to Martha, touching their shirts and socks and other necessary articles of attire, they got downstairs somehow, and flew out of the house on their way to the college schoolroom; Gerald drinking down a fresh-made cup of coffee, scalding hot; Tod cramming a thick piece of bread and butter into his trousers pocket, and trusting to good luck to eat it between whiles. All this was nothing unusual; it was the customary scuffle of Sunday morning. The Yorkes did get to college somehow, and there was an end of it.

After the conclusion of the service, as the congregation were dispersing, Mr. Galloway came up to Arthur Channing in the cloisters, and drew him aside.

"Do you recollect taking out the letters to the post last Friday afternoon?" he inquired.

"On Friday?" mused Arthur, who could not at the moment recollect much about that particular day's letters. It was he who generally posted them for the office.

"Oh yes, I do remember, sir," he replied, as the relative circumstances flashed across him.

Mr. Galloway looked at him, possibly doubting whether he really did remember. "How many letters were there for the post that afternoon?" he asked.

"Three," promptly rejoined Arthur. "Two were for London, and one was for Ventnor."

"Just so," assented Mr. Galloway. "Now, then, to whom did you entrust the posting of those letters?"

"I did not entrust them to any one," replied Arthur; "I posted them myself."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure, sir," answered Arthur in some surprise. But Mr. Galloway said no more, and gave no explanation of the reason for his inquiry. He turned into his own house, which was situated near the cloister gates, and Arthur went on to his.

Had you been attending worship in Helstonleigh Cathedral that same afternoon, you might have observed, as one of the congregation, a tall, stout man, with a dark, sallow face and gray hair. He sat in a stall near to the Reverend William Yorke, who was the officiating chanter for the afternoon. It was Dr. Lamb. A somewhat peculiar history was his. Brought up to the medical profession, and taking his physician's degree early, he went out to settle in New Zealand, where he had friends. Circumstances brought him into frequent contact with the natives there. A benevolent, thoughtful man, gifted with much Christian grace, the sad spiritual state of these poor heathens gave the deepest concern to Dr. Lamb. He did what he could for them between whiles, but his profession took up most of his time. Often did he wish he had more time at his command. A few years of hard work, and then the wish was realized. A small patrimony was beqeathed him, sufficient to enable him to live. From that time he applied himself to the arduous duties of a missionary, and his labours were crowned with marked success. Next came illness. He was attacked with rheumatism in the joints ; and after many unavailing remedies had been tried, came home in search of health, which he found, as you have heard, in certain spas of Germany.

Mr. Channing watched the timepiece eagerly. Unless it has been your portion, my reader, to undergo long and apparently hopeless affliction, and to find yourself at length unexpectedly told that there *may* be a cure for you—that another, afflicted in a similar manner, has been restored to health by simple means, and will call upon you and describe to you what they were—you could scarcely comprehend the nervous expectancy of Mr. Channing on this afternoon. Four o'clock ! They would not be long now.

A very little time longer and they were with him—his family, Mr. Yorke, and Dr. Lamb. The chief subject of anxiety was soon entered upon, Dr. Lamb describing his illness at great length.

"But were you as helpless as I am ?" inquired Mr. Channing.

"Quite as helpless. I was carried on board the ship, and carried to a bed at a hotel when I reached England. From what I have heard of your case, and by what you say, I should judge the nature of your malady to be precisely similar to mine."

"And now tell me about the healing remedy.

Dr. Lamb paused. "You must promise to put faith in my description."

Mr. Channing raised his eyes in surprise. "Why should I not put faith in it?"

"Because it will appear to you so very simple. I consulted a medical man in London, one eminent in rheumatic cases, and he gave it as his opinion that a month or two passed at one of the Continental springs might restore me. I laughed at him."

"You did not believe him?"

"I did not, indeed. Shall I confess to you that I felt *vexed* with him? There was I, a poor, afflicted man, lying in helplessness, racked with pain; and to be gravely assured that a short sojourn at a pleasant foreign watering-place would, in all probability, *cure* me, sounded to me very like mockery. I knew something of the disease, its ordinary treatment, and its various phases. It was true I had left Europe many years, and strange changes had been taking place in medical science. Still I had no faith in what he said, as being applicable to my own case; and for a whole month, week after week, day after day, declined to entertain his views. I considered that it would be so much time and money lost."

Dr. Lamb paused. Mr. Channing did not interrupt him.

"One Sunday evening I was on my solitary sofa, lying in pain, as I can see you are lying now. The bells were ringing out for evening service. I lay thinking of my distressing condition, wishing I could be healed. By-and-by, after the bells had ceased, and the worshippers had assembled within the walls of the sanctuary, from which privilege I was excluded, I took my Bible. It opened of itself at the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Kings. I began to read it, somewhat, I fear, listlessly—listlessly, at any rate, compared with the strange enthusiasm which grew over me as I read, 'Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. And Naaman was wroth......And his servants spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash, and be clean?'

"Mr. Channing," Dr. Lamb continued in a deeper tone, "the words sounded in my ear, fell upon my heart, like a very message sent direct from God. All the folly of my own obstinate disbelief came full upon me; the scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I said, 'Shall I not try the simple thing?' A firm conviction that the chapter had been directed to me that night as a warning seated itself within me, and from that hour I never entertained a shadow of doubt that the baths would be successful."

"And you journeyed to them?"

"Instantly. Within a week I was there. I seemed to *know* that I was going to my cure. You will not, probably, understand this."

"I understand it perfectly," was Mr. Channing's answer. "I believe that a merciful Providence does vouchsafe, at rare times, to move us by these direct interpositions. I need not ask you if you were cured. I have heard you were. I see you are. Can you tell me aught of the actual means?"

"I was ordered to a part of Prussian Germany, a small place in the vicinity of Aix-la-Chapelle—a quiet, unpretending, cheap place, where there are ever-perpetual springs of boiling, sulphuric water. The precise course of treatment I will come in another day and describe to you. I had to drink a great deal of the water, warm—six or eight half-pints of it per day; I had to bathe regularly in this water; and I had to take what are called douche baths every other day."

"I have heard of the douche baths," said Mr. Channing. "Rather fierce, are they not?"

"Fierce!" echoed the doctor. "The first time I tried one I thought I was never coming out alive. The water was dashed upon me, through a tube, with what seemed alarming force, until I got used to it; while an attendant rubbed and turned and twisted my limbs as if they had been so many straws in his strong hand. So violent was the action of the water that my face had to be protected by a board, lest it should come in contact with it."

"Strong treatment!" remarked Mr. Channing.

"Strong, but effectual—effectual, so far as my case was concerned. Whether it was the drinking of the water, or the sulphur baths, or the douches, or the pure air, or the Prussian doctor's medicine, or all combined, I was, under God's goodness, restored to health. I entertain no doubt that you may be."

"And the cost?" asked Mr. Channing, with a sigh he could not wholly suppress.

"There's the beauty of it—there's the benefit to us poor folks, who possess but a shallow purse, and that only half filled," laughed Dr. Lamb. "Had it been expensive, *I* could not have afforded it. These baths, mind you, are in the hotel, which is the greatest possible accommodation to invalids; the warm baths cost a franc each, the douche two francs, the water you drink nothing. The doctor's fee is four and sixpence, and you need not consult him much. Ascertain the proper course, and go on with it."

"But the living in the hotel?"

"It cost me four shillings per day, everything included, except a trifle for servants. Candles alone were extras, and I did not burn much of them, for I was glad to get to bed early. Wine I do not take, or that would have been an extra. You could not live very much cheaper at home."

"How I should like to go!" broke from the lips of Mr. Channing.

Hamish came forward. "You must go, my dear father. It shall be managed."

"You speak hopefully, Hamish."

Hamish smiled. "I feel so, sir."

"Do you feel so also, my friend!" implored Dr. Lamb fervently. "Go forth to the medicinal remedy as I did, in the full confidence that God can and will send His blessing upon it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. JENKINS ALIVE AGAIN.

THE quiet of Sunday was over, and Helstonleigh awoke on the Monday morning to the bustle of everyday life. Mr. Jenkins awoke, with others, and got up—not Jenkins the old bedesman, but his son Joseph, who had the gray mare for his wife. It was Mr. Jenkins's intention to resume his occupation that day, with Mr. Hurst's and Mrs. Jenkins's permission: the former's he might have defied; the latter's he dared not. However, he was on the safe side, for both had accorded it.

Mrs. Jenkins was making breakfast in the small parlour behind her hosiery shop when her husband appeared. He looked all the worse for his accident. Poor Joe was one whom a little illness told upon. Thin, pale, and lantern-jawed at the best of times—indeed he was not in-frequently honoured with the nickname of "scarecrow"—he looked now thinner and paler than ever. His tall, shadowy form seemed bent with the weakness induced by lying a few days in bed; while his hair had been cut off in three places at the top of his head, to give place to as many patches of white plaster.

"A nice figure you'll cut in the office to-day with those ornaments on your crown!" was Mrs. Jenkins's salutation.

"I am thinking to fold this broadly upon my head, and tie it under my chin," said he meekly, holding out a square, black silk handkerchief which he had brought down in his hand.

"That would not hide the patch upon your forehead, stupid!" responded Mrs. Jenkins. "I believe you must have bumped upon the edge of every stair in the organ-loft as you came down to get so many different wounds!" she continued in a cross tone. "If you ever do such a senseless trick again, you shan't stir abroad without me or the maid at your back to take care of you. I promise you that."

"I have combed my hair over the place upon my forehead!" civilly replied Mr. Jenkins. "I don't think it shows much."

"And made yourself look like an owl! I thought it was nothing less than a stuffed owl coming in. Why can't you wear your hat? That would hide your crown and your forehead also."

"I did think of that; and I dare say Mr. Galloway would allow me to do it, and pardon the disrespect, in consideration of the circumstances," answered Jenkins. "But then I thought again: suppose the dean should chance to come into the office to-day, or any of the canons? There's no telling but they may. I could not keep my hat on in their presence; and I should not like to take it off and expose the plasters."

"You'd frighten them away if you did," said Mrs. Jenkins, dashing some water into the teapot.

"Therefore," he added, when she had finished speaking, "I think it will be better to put on this handkerchief. People do wear such when suffering from neuralgia, or from toothache."

"Law! wear it if you like! What a fuss you make about nothing! If you chose to go with your head wrapped up in a blanket, nobody would look at you."

"Very true," meekly coughed Mr. Jenkins.

"What are you doing with your bacon?" irascibly demanded Mrs. Jenkins, perceiving that of two slices which she had put upon his plate he was surreptitiously conveying one back to the dish.

"I am not hungry this morning. I cannot eat it."

"I say you shall eat it. What next? Do you think you are going to famish yourself?"

"My appetite will come back to me in a morning or two," he deprecatingly observed.

"It is back quite enough for that bacon," was the answer. "Come! I'll have it eaten."

She ruled him in everything, as she would a child; and, appetite or no appetite, Mr. Jenkins had to eat the bacon. Then he prepared for his departure. The black silk square was tied on so as to cover the damages; the hat was well drawn over the brows, and Mr. Jenkins started. When Mr. Galloway entered his office that morning, which he did earlier than usual, there sat Mr. Jenkins in his usual place, copying a lease.

He looked glad to see his old clerk. It is pleasant to welcome an accustomed face after an absence. "Are you sure you are equal to work, Jenkins?"

"Quite so, sir, thank you. I had a little fever at first, and Mr. Hurst was afraid of that, but it has entirely subsided. Beyond being a trifle sore on the head, and stiff at the elbows and one hip, I am quite myself again."

"I was sorry to hear of the accident, Jenkins," Mr. Galloway resumed.

"I was as vexed at it as I could be, sir. When I first came to myself, I hardly knew what damage was done; and the uncertainty of my getting to business, perhaps for weeks, did worrit me much. I don't deny, too, that I have been in a little pain; but oh, sir, it was worth its happening—it was indeed—only to experience the kindness and good fellowship that have been shown me. I am sure half the town has been to see me, or to ask after me."

"I hear you have had your share of visitors."

"The bishop himself came," said poor Jenkins, grateful tears rising to his eyes in the intensity of his emotion. "He did, indeed, sir. He came on the Friday, and groped his way up our dark stairs (for very dark they are when Mr. Harper's sitting-room door is shut), and sat down by my bedside, and chatted, just as plainly and familiarly as if he had been no better than one of my own acquaintances. Mr. Arthur Channing found him there when he came with your kind message, sir."

"So I heard," said Mr. Galloway. "You and the bishop were both in the same boat. I cannot, for my part, get at the mystery of that locking-up business."

"The bishop as good as said so, sir—that we had both been in it. I was trying to express my acknowledgments to his lordship for his condescension, apologizing for my plain bedroom, and the dark stairs, and all that, and saying, as well as I knew how, that the like of me was not worthy of a visit from him, when he laughed in his affable way, and said, 'We were both caught in the trap, Jenkins. Had I been the one to receive personal injury, I make no doubt that you would have come the next day to inquire after me.' What a great thing it is to be blessed with a loving, benevolent heart like the Bishop of Helstonleigh!"

Arthur Channing came in and interrupted the conversation. He was settling to his occupation, when Mr. Galloway drew his attention in a very abrupt, angry manner, as it struck Arthur,—

"Channing, you told me yesterday that you posted that letter for Ventnor on Friday."

"So I did, sir."

"It has been robbed."

"Robbed!" returned Arthur in surprise, scarcely catching immediately the meaning of the word.

"You know that it contained money—a twenty-pound note. You saw me put it in."

"Yes—I—know—that," hesitated Arthur.

"What are you stammering at?"

In good truth Arthur could not have told, except that he hesitated in surprise. He had cast his thoughts back, and was lost in them.

"The fact is you did *not* post the letters yourself," resumed Mr. Galloway. "You gave them to somebody else to post, in a fit of idleness, and the result is that the letter was rifled, and I have lost twenty pounds."

"Sir, I assure you that I did post them myself," replied Arthur, with firmness. "I went direct from this door to the post-office. In coming back I called on Jenkins"—turning to him—"as you bade me, and afterwards I returned straight here. I mentioned to you then, sir, that the bishop was with Jenkins."

Mr. Jenkins glanced up from his desk, a streak of colour illumining his thin cheek, half hidden by the black handkerchief. "I was just saying, sir, to Mr. Galloway that you found his lordship at my bedside," he cried to Arthur.

"Has the note been taken out of the letter, sir?" demanded Arthur. "Did the letter get to its destination without it?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Galloway, answering both questions "I had a few lines from Mr. Robert Galloway yesterday morning, stating that the letter had arrived, but no bank-note was enclosed in it. Now, where is the note?"

"Where can it be?" reiterated Arthur. "The letter must have been opened in the transit. I declare to you, sir, that I put it safely into the post-office."

"It is a crying shame for this civilized country that one cannot send a bank-note across the kingdom in a letter but it must get taken out of it!" exclaimed Mr. Galloway in his vexation. "The puzzle to me is, how those thieves of letter-carriers happen just to pitch upon the letters to open that contain money!"

He went into his private room as he spoke, banging the door after him, a sure symptom that his temper was not in a state of equanimity, and not hearing or seeing Roland Yorke, who had entered, and was wishing him good-morning.

"What's amiss? He seems in a tantrum," ejaculated Mr. Roland, with his customary scant ceremony. "Hallo, Jenkins! is it really you? By the accounts brought here, I thought you were not going to have a head on your shoulders for six months to come. Glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir. I am thankful to say I have got pretty well over the hurt."

"Roland," said Arthur in a half whisper, bringing his head close to his friend's as they leaned together over the desk, "you remember that Ventnor letter, sent on Friday, with the money in it——"

"Ventnor letter!" interrupted Roland. "What Ventnor letter?"

"The one for Robert Galloway. Hamish was looking at it. It had the twenty-pound note in it."

"For Ventnor, was it? I did not notice what place it was bound for. That fellow, the cousin Galloway, changes his place of abode like the wandering Jew. What of the letter?"

"It has been robbed of the note."

"No!" uttered Roland.

"It has. The cousin says the letter reached him, but the note did not. Mr. Galloway seems uncommonly put out. He accused me at first of not taking it myself to the post. As if I should confide letters of value to anybody not trustworthy!"

"Did you post it yourself?" asked Roland.

"Of course I did. When you were coming in, after playing truant on Friday afternoon, I was going then. You might have seen the letters in my hand."

Roland shook his head. "I was in too great a stew to notice letters or anything else. This will cure Galloway of sending bank-notes in letters. Have the post-office people had news of the loss sent to them? They must hunt up the thief."

"Mr. Galloway is sure to do all that's necessary," remarked Arthur.

"For my part, if I sent bank-notes across the country in letters, I should expect them to get taken. I wonder at Galloway. He is cautious in other things."

Others had wondered at Mr. Galloway besides Roland Yorke. A man of caution generally, he yet persisted in the practice of enclosing bank-notes in letters—whole notes, too, not halves. Persons cognizant of this habit had remonstrated with him—not his clerks; of course they had not presumed to do so. Mr. Galloway, who liked his own way, had become somewhat testy upon the point, and, not a week previous to the present time, had answered in a sort of contradictory spirit that his money-letters had always gone safely hitherto, and he made no doubt they always would go safely. The present loss, therefore, coming, as it were, to check his obstinacy, vexed him more than it would otherwise have done. He did not care for the loss of the money half so much as he did for the tacit reproof of himself.

"I wonder if Galloway took the number of the notes," cried Roland. "Whether or not, though, it would not serve him much: bank notes lost in transit never come to light."

"Don't they, though?" retorted Arthur. "Look at the many convictions for post-office robbery!"

"I do not suppose that one case in ten is tracked home," disputed Roland. "They are regular thieves, those letter-carriers. But, then, the fellows are paid so badly."

"Do not be so sweeping in your assertions, Roland Yorke," interposed Mr. Galloway, coming forward from his private room. "How dare you so asperse the letter-carriers? They are a hard-working, quiet, honest body of men. Yes, sir, honest; I repeat it. Where one has yielded to temptation, fingering what was not his own, hundreds rise superior to it, retaining their integrity always. I would advise you not to be so free with your tongue."

Not to be free with his tongue would have been hard to Roland. "Lady Augusta was sending a box of camomile pills to some friend in Ireland the other day, sir; but it was never heard of again after she put it into the post-office here," cried he to Mr. Galloway. "The fellow who appropriated it no doubt thought he had got a prize of jewels. I should like to have seen his mortification when he opened the parcel and found it contained pills! Lady Augusta said she hoped he had the liver complaint, and then they might be of service to him."

Mr. Galloway made no response. He had caught up a lease that was lying on Jenkins's desk, and stood looking at it with no pleasant expression of countenance. On went that undaunted Roland,—

"The next thing Lady Augusta had occasion to send by post was a gold cameo pin. It was enclosed in a pasteboard box, and when packed looked just like the parcel of pills. I wrote PILLS on it in great round text hand. That reached its destination safely, sir."

"Safer than you would if it depended upon your pursuing your business steadily," retorted Mr. Galloway to Roland. "Fill in that tithe paper."

As Roland, with a suppressed yawn, and in his usual lazy manner, set himself to the work indicated, there came a clatter at the office door, and a man in the uniform of a telegraphic official entered, bearing a dispatch in his hand. Mr. Galloway had then turned to his own room, and Roland, ever ready for anything but work, started up and received the packet from the man.

"Where's it from?" asked he in his curiosity.

"Southampton," replied the messenger.

"A telegram from Southampton, sir," announced Roland to Mr. Galloway.

The latter took the dispatch and opened it, directing Jenkins to sign the paper. This done, the messenger departed.

The words of the message were very few, but Mr. Galloway's eye was bending upon them sternly, and his brow had knitted as if in perplexity.

"Young gentlemen, you must look to this," he said, coming forward and standing before Roland and Arthur. "I find that the post-office is not to blame for this loss; that it must have occurred here, in this room, before the letter went near the post-office."

They both looked up; both coloured red, as if with inward emotion. Thoughts, we all know, are quick as lightning. What was each thinking of, that it should give rise to emotion? Arthur was the first to speak.

"Do you allude to the loss of the bank-note, sir?"

"What else should I be likely to allude to?" sharply answered Mr. Galloway.

"But the post-office must be cheeky to deny it off-hand!" flashed Roland. "How is it possible that they can answer for the honesty of every man whose hands that letter passed through?"

"Pray, who told you they had denied it, Mr. Roland Yorke?" demanded his master.

Roland felt a little checked. "I inferred it, sir."

"I dare say. Then allow me to tell you that they have not denied it. And one very cogent reason why they have not is, that they are not yet cognizant of the loss. I do not jump at conclusions as you do, Roland Yorke, and I thought it necessary to make a little private inquiry before accusing the post-office, lest the post-office might not be in fault, you know."

"Quite right, I have no doubt, sir," replied Roland in a chafed accent, for Mr. Galloway was speaking satirically, and Roland never liked to have ridicule cast to him. Like old Ketch, it stung his temper.

"By this communication," touching the telegraphic dispatch, "I learn that the letter was not opened after it left this office," resumed Mr. Galloway. "Consequently the note must have been abstracted from it while the letter lay here. Who has been guilty of it?"

Neither Arthur nor Roland spoke. It was not a pleasant accusation—if you can call it an accusation—and the red on their faces deepened to scarlet; while Mr. Jenkins looked up, half terrified, and began to think what a mercy it was that he had broken his head, just that last particular Thursday night, on the marble flags of the cathedral.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOSS.

WHEN money is lost out of an office, suspicion very frequently falls upon one or more of that office's *employés*. Mr. Galloway's doubts, however, had not yet extended to those employed in his. The letter containing the banknote had been dispatched to Mr. Robert Galloway, at Ventnor, on the Friday. On the Sunday morning, while Mr. Galloway was at breakfast, a short answer was delivered to him from his cousin:—"Your letter has reached me, but not the note; you must have omitted to put it in," was the news it contained relative to that particular point. Mr. Galloway knew that he had put the note in; there was little doubt that both his clerks could testify that he had put it in, for he did it in their presence. How could it have been taken out? Had it been abstracted while the letter was still in his office, or in its conveyance to the post, or in its transmission to Ventnor? "If in the office," argued Mr. Galloway, "it must have been done before I sealed it; if afterwards, that seal must have been tampered with, probably broken. I'll drop a note to Robert and ask the question." He rose from his breakfast and penned a line to Southampton, where, as he had reason to believe, Mr. Robert Galloway would be on the Monday. It was not Mr. Galloway's habit to write letters on a Sunday, but he deemed that the present occasion justified the deed. "I did put the note in the letter," he wrote. "Send me word instantly whether the seal had been tampered with. I stamped it with my private seal." Mr. Robert Galloway received this on the Monday morning. He did not wait for the post, but forwarded the reply by telegraph—"The seal had not been broken. Will send you back the envelope by first post." This was the dispatch which you saw Mr. Galloway receive in his office.

He went back into his private room, carrying the dispatch with him, and there he sat down to think. From the very first he had not believed the fraud to lie with the post-office, for this reason: had the note been abstracted by one of its servants, the letter would have been almost sure not to have reached its destination; it would have disappeared with the note. He had cast a doubt as to whether Arthur Channing had posted the letters himself. Arthur assured him that he had, and Mr. Galloway believed him. The information that the seal of the letter was unbroken was now a further confirmation, had he needed it—at least, it was a confirmation that the letter had not been opened after it quitted the office. Mr. Galloway perfectly remembered fastening down the letter. He put the bank-note in, wet the gum, and stuck it down. He probably would have sealed it then, but for the commotion that arose at that same moment in the street, caused by Mad Nance. There could be no shadow of doubt, so far as Mr. Galloway could see, and so far as he believed, that the abstraction had taken place between the time of his gumming down the envelope and of his sealing it. Who had done it?

"I'll lay a guinea I know how it happened!" he exclaimed to himself. "Channing was at college—I must have given him permission in a soft moment to take that organ, or I should never have done it, quitting the office daily!—and Yorke, in his indolent carelessness, must have got gossiping outside, leaving, it is hard to say who, in the office! This comes of poor Jenkins's fall!"

Mr. Galloway rang his table bell. It was answered by Jenkins. "Send Mr. Arthur Channing in," said Mr. Galloway.

Arthur entered in obedience. Mr. Galloway made a sign to him to close the door, and then spoke.

"This is an awkward business, Channing."

"Very awkward indeed, sir," replied Arthur, at no loss to understand what Mr. Galloway alluded to. "I do not see that it was possible for the note to have been taken from the letter except in its transmission through the post."

"I tell you it was taken from it before it left this office," tartly returned Mr. Galloway. "I have my reasons for the assertion. Did you see me put the bank-note in the letter?"

"Of course I did, sir. I was standing by when you did it. I remained by you after bringing you the note from this room."

"I put the note inside, and fastened down the envelope," said Mr. Galloway, pointing the feather of his quill pen at each proposition. "I did not seal it then, for the looking at Mad Nance hindered me, and I went out, leaving the letter on Jenkins's desk, in your charge and Yorke's."

"Yes, sir. I placed the letter in the rack in your room immediately afterwards."

"And, pray, what loose acquaintances did you and Yorke get in here that afternoon ?"

"Not any," replied Arthur. "I do not know when the office was so free from callers. No person whatever entered it, except my brother Hamish."

"That's all nonsense," said Mr. Galloway. "You are getting to speak as incautiously as Yorke. How can you tell who came here when you were at college ? Yorke would be alone then."

"No, Yorke was not," Arthur was beginning. But he stopped suddenly and hesitated. He did not care to tell Mr. Galloway that Yorke had played truant all that afternoon. Mr. Galloway saw his hesitation, and did not like it.

"Come, what have you to conceal ? You and Yorke held a levee here, I suppose. That's the fact. You had so many chaps in here gossiping that you don't know who may have meddled with the letter ; and when you were off to college, they stopped with Yorke."

"No, sir. For one thing, I did not take the organ that afternoon. I went as usual, but Mr. Williams was there himself, so I came back. I was only away about ten minutes."

"And how many did you find with Yorke ?"

"Yorke stepped out to speak to somebody just before I went to college," replied Arthur, obliged to allude to it, but determined to say as little as possible. "Hamish was here, sir ; you met him coming in as you were going out, and I got him to stay in the office till I came back."

"Pretty doings !" retorted Mr. Galloway. "Hindering the time of Mr. Hamish Channing that you and Yorke may kick up your heels ! Nice trustworthy clerks, both of you !"

"I was obliged to go to college, sir," said Arthur in a tone of deprecation.

"Was Yorke obliged to go out ?"

"I was back again very shortly, I assure you, sir," said Arthur, passing by the remark. "And I did not quit the office again until you sent me to the post."

"Stop !" said Mr. Galloway ; "let me clearly understand. As I went out, Hamish came in. Then you say Yorke went out ; and you, to get to college, left Hamish keeping office. Did anybody else come in besides Hamish ?"

"Not any one. When I returned from college I inquired of Hamish who had called, and he said nobody had called. Lady Augusta Yorke drove up then, and Hamish went away with her. She was going to the missionary meeting."

"And you persist in saying that nobody came in after that?"

"Nobody did come in, sir."

"Very well. Send Yorke to me."

Roland made his appearance, a pen behind his ear and a ruler in his hand.

"More show than work!" sarcastically exclaimed Mr. Galloway. "Now, sir, I have been questioning Mr. Arthur Channing about this unpleasant business, for I am determined to come to the bottom of it. I can get nothing satisfactory from him, so I must try what I can do with you. Have the goodness to tell me how you spent your time on Friday afternoon."

"On Friday? Let's see," began Roland, out of his wits with perplexity as to how he should hide his afternoon's absence from Mr. Galloway. "It's difficult to recollect what one does on one particular day more than on another, sir."

"Oh, indeed! Perhaps, to begin with, you can remember the circumstance of my putting the bank-note in the letter. I went into the other room to consult a Bradshaw——"

"I remember that quite well, sir," interrupted Roland. "Channing fetched the bank-note from this room, and you put it in. It was just before we were all called to the window by Mad Nance."

"After that?" pursued Mr. Galloway.

"After that? I think, sir, you went out after that, and Hamish Channing came in."

"Who else came in?"

"I don't remember anybody else," answered Roland, wishing somebody would come in *then*, and stop the questioning. No such luck, however.

"How many people called in while Channing was at college and you were keeping office?" demanded Mr. Galloway.

Roland fidgeted, first on one leg, then on the other. He felt that it must all come out. "What a passion he'll go into with me!" thought Roland. "It is certain that nobody can have touched the bank-note in this office, sir," he said aloud. "Those poor, half-starved postmen must have helped themselves to it."

"When I ask for your opinion upon who has helped themselves to it' it will be time enough to give it me," returned Mr. Galloway dryly. "I say that the money was abstracted from the letter before it left this office, when it was under the charge of you and Channing."

"I hope you do not suspect us of taking it, sir!" said Roland, going into a heat.

"I suspect that you have been guilty of negligence in some way, Mr. Roland. Could the bank-note drop out of the letter of itself?"

"I suppose it could not, sir."

"Good! Then it is my business to ascertain, if I can, how it did get out of it. You have not answered my question. Who came into this office while Channing was at the cathedral on Friday afternoon?"

"I declare nobody ever had such luck as I," burst forth Roland, in a tone half comic, half defiant, as he felt he must make a merit of necessity and confess. "If I get into the smallest scrape in the world, it is safe to come out. The fact is, sir, I was not here last Friday afternoon during Channing's hour for college."

"What! not at all?" exclaimed Mr. Galloway, who had not suspected Yorke was absent so long.

"As I say, it's my luck to get found out!" grumbled Roland. "I can't lift a finger to-day, if it ought not to be lifted, but it gets known to-morrow. I saw one of my chums going past the end of the street, sir, and I ran after him. And I am sorry to say I got seduced into stopping out with him longer than I ought."

Mr. Galloway stared at Roland. "At what time did you go out?" he asked.

"Just after you did, sir. The bell was going for college."

"And pray what time did you come in?"

"Well, sir, you saw me come in. It was getting on for five o'clock."

"Do you mean to say you had not been in at all between those times?"

"It was Knivett's fault," grumbled Roland. "He kept me."

Mr. Galloway sat drumming on his desk, apparently gazing at Roland—in reality, thinking. To hear that Mr. Roland Yorke had taken French leave for nearly a whole afternoon's holiday, just on the especial afternoon that he ought not to have taken it—Jenkins being away—did not surprise him in the least; it was very much in the line of the Yorkes to do so. To scold or punish Roland for it would have been productive of little good, since he was sure to do it again on the first temptation that offered. Failing the temptation, he would stop at his post steadily enough. No; it was not the escapade of Roland that Mr. Galloway was considering, but the very narrow radius that the affair of the letter appeared to be drawing itself into. If Roland was absent, he could not have had half the town in to chatter; and if Arthur Channing asserted that none had been in, Mr. Galloway could give credence to Arthur. But then, how had the money disappeared? Who had got it?

"Channing!" he called out, loudly and sharply.

Arthur, who was preparing to attend the cathedral, for the bell had rung out, hastened in.

"How came you not to tell me, when we were speaking of Roland Yorke's absence, that he remained away all the afternoon?" questioned Mr. Galloway.

Arthur was silent. He glanced once at Roland.

"Well?" cried Mr. Galloway.

"It was better for him to tell you himself, sir, as I conclude he has now done."

"The fact is, you are two birds of a feather," stormed Mr. Galloway, who, when he did get into an angry temper, which was not often, was apt to say anything that came uppermost, just or unjust. "The one won't tell tales of the other. If the one set my office on fire, and then said it was the cat did it, the other would stick to it. Is it true, sir, that he was not at the office during my absence from it on Friday afternoon?" he continued to Arthur.

"That is true."

"Then who can have taken the money?" uttered Mr. Galloway, speaking what was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Which is as much as to say that I took it," burst forth haughty Roland. "Mr. Galloway, I——"

"You just keep your tongue quiet, Roland Yorke," interrupted that gentleman. "I do not suspect you of taking it. I did suspect that you might have got some idlers in here, *mauvais sujets*, you know, for you call plenty of them friends; but if you were absent yourself, that suspicion falls to the ground. Again I say, Who can have taken the money?"

"It is an utter impossibility that Yorke could have taken it, even were he capable of such a thing," generously spoke Arthur. "From the time you quitted the office yourself, sir, until after the letters were taken out of it to be conveyed to the post, he was away from it."

"Just like him!" exclaimed Mr. Galloway. "It must have been done while your brother Hamish was waiting in the office. We must ascertain from him who came in."

"He told me nobody came in," repeated Arthur.

"Rubbish!" testily observed Mr. Galloway. "Somebody must have come in—somebody with light fingers, too! The money could not go without hands. You are off to college now, I suppose, Channing?"

"Yes, sir."

"When service is over, just go down as far as your brother's office, and ask him about it."

"He is as obstinate as any old adder!" exclaimed Roland Yorke to Arthur, when they left Mr. Galloway alone. "The only possible way in which it can have gone is through that post-office. The men have forked it, like they did Lady Augusta's pills."

"He says it was not the post-office," mused Arthur. "He said—as I understood—that the telegraphic dispatch proved to him that it had been taken out here."

"What an idiot you are!" ejaculated Roland. "How *could* a dispatch tell him who took it, or who did not?—unless it was a dispatch from those spirit-rappers—mesmerists, or whatever they call themselves. They profess to show you who your grandmother was, if you don't know!"

Roland laughed as he spoke. Arthur was not inclined for joking; the affair perplexed him in no common degree. "I wish Mr. Galloway would mention his grounds for thinking the note was abstracted before it went to the post," he said.

"He ought to mention them," cried Roland fiercely. "He says he learns by the dispatch, that the letter was not opened after it left this office. Now, it is impossible that any dispatch could tell him that. He talks to me about broad assertions! That's a pretty broad one. What did the dispatch say? Who sent it?"

"Would it afford you satisfaction to know, Mr. Roland?" And Roland wheeled round with a start, for it was the voice of Mr. Galloway. He had followed them into the front office, and caught the latter part of the conversation. "Come, sir," he added, "I will teach you a lesson in caution. When I have sealed letters that contained money, after they were previously fastened down with gum, I have seen you throw your head back, Mr. Roland, with that favourite scornful movement of yours. 'As if gum did not stick them fast enough!' you have said in your heart. But now the fact of my having sealed this letter in question enables me to say that the letter was not opened after it quitted my hands. The dispatch you are so curious about was from my cousin, telling me that the seal reached him intact."

"I did not know the letter was sealed," remarked Roland. "But that proves nothing, sir. They might melt the wax and seal it up again. Everybody keeps a stamp of this sort," he added, stretching his hand out for the seal ordinarily used in the office—a common cross-barred wafer stamp.

"Ah," said Mr. Galloway, "you are very clever, Master Roland. But I happened to stamp that letter with my private seal."

"That alters the case, of course," said Roland, after a pause. "Sir, I wish you would set me to work to find out," he impulsively continued. "I'd go to the post-office and——"

"And make enough noise there for ten, and defeat your own ends," interrupted Mr. Galloway.—"Channing, you will be late. Do not forget to see Hamish."

"Yes, I must be off," said Arthur with a start, coming out of his reverie. He had waited to hear about the seal, and now flew towards the cathedral.

"I wish it had not happened!" he ejaculated. "I know Galloway does not suspect me or Yorke; but still I wish it had never happened!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE LOOMING OF AN AWFUL FEAR.

HAMISH CHANNING sat in his private room—his now; for, in the absence of Mr. Channing, Hamish was master. The insurance office was situated in Guild Street, a principal street, near to the town hall. It consisted of an entrance hall, two rooms, and a closet for hanging up coats and for washing hands. The room on the left of the hall, as you entered, was the principal office; the room on the right of the hall was the private room of Mr. Channing—used, I say, by Hamish. The upper part of the house was occupied as a dwelling, the family renting it having nothing to do with the office. It was a commodious house, and possessed a separate entrance.

Hamish—gay, good-tempered, careless though he was—ruled the office with a firm hand. There was no familiarity of manner there. The clerks liked him, but they had to defer to him and obey him. He was seated at his desk, deep in some accounts, on this same morning—the one mentioned in the last chapter—when one of the clerks entered and said that Mr. Arthur Channing was asking to speak to him; for it was Mr. Hamish Channing's good pleasure not to be interrupted indiscriminately, unless a clerk first ascertained whether he was at liberty to be seen. Possibly Hamish feared there might be treachery abroad.

Arthur entered. Hamish pushed his books from before him, and stretched himself. "Well, old fellow? You seem out of breath."

"I came down at such a pace," rejoined Arthur. "College is just over. I say, Hamish, a disagreeable thing has happened at Galloway's. I have never seen him put out as he is now."

"Has his hair taken a change again and come on a lovely rose colour?"

"I *wish* you would not turn everything into a joke," cried Arthur, who was really troubled, and the words vexed him. "You saw a letter on Jenkins's desk last Friday—the afternoon, you know, that Yorke went off and you remained while I went to college? There was a twenty-pound note in it. Well, the note has, in some mysterious manner, been abstracted from it."

Hamish lifted his eyebrows. "What can Galloway expect if he sends bank-notes in letters?"

"Yes, but this was abstracted before it left our office. Galloway says so. He sealed it with his private seal, and the letter arrived at his cousin's intact, the seal unbroken—a pretty sure proof that the note could not have been in it when it was sealed."

"Who took it out?" asked Hamish.

"That's the question. There was not a soul near the place, that I can find out, except you and I. Yorke was away, Jenkins was away, and Mr. Galloway was away. He says some one must have come in while you were in the office."

"There did not so much as a ghost come in," said Hamish.

"Are you sure, Hamish?"

"Sure! I am sure they did not, unless I dropped asleep. *That* was not an unlikely catastrophe to happen, shut up by myself in that dull office, amid musty parchments, with nothing to do."

"Hamish, can you be serious for once? This is a serious matter."

"Mr. Martin Pope wants you, sir," said the clerk again, interrupting at this juncture. Martin Pope's face came in also, over the clerk's shoulder. It was red, and he looked in a hurry.

"Hamish, he has had a letter, and is off by the half-past eleven train," spoke Martin Pope in some excitement. "You must rush up to the station if you want a last word with him. You will hardly catch him, running your best."

Up jumped Hamish, in excitement as great as his friend's. He shut down and locked the table-desk, caught his hat, and was speeding out of the office, when Arthur, to whom the words had been a puzzle, laid hold of his arm.

"Hamish, *did* any one come in? It was Mr. Galloway sent me here to ascertain."

"No, they did not. Should I not tell you if they had? Take care, Arthur. I must fly like the wind.—Come away, Pope!"

Arthur walked back to Mr. Galloway's. That gentleman was out. Roland Yorke was out. But Jenkins, upon whom the unfortunate affair had taken a great hold, lifted his face to Arthur, his eyes asking the question that his tongue scarcely presumed to do.

"My brother says nobody came in while he was here. It is very strange!"

"Mr. Arthur, sir, if I had repined at all at that accident, and felt it as a misfortune, how this would have reproved me!" spoke Jenkins in his simple faith. "Why, sir, it must have come to me as a mercy, a blessing, to take me away out of this office at the time."

"What do you mean, Jenkins?"

"There's no telling, sir, but Mr. Galloway might have suspected me. It is the first loss we have had since I have been here, all these years; and——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Arthur. "You may as well fear that Mr. Galloway will suspect me or Mr. Yorke."

"No, sir; you and Mr. Yorke are different—you are gentlemen. Mr. Galloway would no more suspect you than he would suspect himself. I am thankful I was absent."

"Be easy, Jenkins," smiled Arthur. "Absent or present, everybody can trust you."

Mr. Galloway did not return until nearly one o'clock. He went straight into his own room. Arthur followed him.

"I have seen Hamish, sir. He says no person whatever entered on Friday while he was here alone."

Mr. Galloway paused, apparently revolving the news. "Hamish must be mistaken," he answered.

"He told me at the time, last Friday, that nobody had been in," resumed Arthur. "I asked the question when I returned from college, thinking people might have called on business. He said they had not, and he says the same now."

"But look you here, Arthur," debated Mr. Galloway in a tone of reasoning. "I suspect neither you nor Yorke—indeed, as it seems, Yorke put himself out of suspicion's way by walking off; but if nobody came to the office, and yet the note *went*, remember the position in which you place yourself. I say I don't blame you, I don't suspect you, but I do say that the mystery must be cleared up. Are you certain no person came into the office during your presence in it?"

"I am quite certain of that, sir. I have told you so."

"And is Hamish equally certain—that no one entered while he was here alone?"

"He says so." But Arthur's words bore a sound of hesitation, which Mr. Galloway may or may not have observed. He would have spoken far more positively had Hamish not joked about it.

"'Says' will not do for me," retorted Mr. Galloway. "I should like to see Hamish. You have nothing particular to finish before one o'clock; suppose you run to Guild Street and request him to come round this way as he goes home to dinner? It will not take him two minutes out of his road."

Arthur departed, choosing the nearest way to Guild Street. It led him through the street which Hamish had been careful to avoid on account of a troublesome creditor. Arthur had no such fear. One o'clock struck as he turned into it. About midway down it, what was his astonishment to encounter Hamish—not slinking along, dreading to be seen, but flourishing leisurely at his ease, nodding to everybody he knew, his sweet smile in full play, and his cane whirling circlets in the air!

"Hamish, I thought this was forbidden ground!"

"So it was, until a day or two ago," laughed Hamish, "but I have managed to charm the enemy."

He spoke in his usual light, careless, half-mocking style, and passed his arm within Arthur's. At that moment a shopkeeper came to his door and respectfully touched his hair—for he wore no hat—to Hamish. Hamish nodded in return, and laughed again as he walked on with Arthur.

"That was the very fiercest enemy in all this street of Philistines, Arthur. See how civil he is now!"

"How did you 'charm' him?"

"Oh, by a process known to myself. Did you come down on purpose to escort me home to dinner? Very polite of you!"

"I came to ask you to go round by Mr. Galloway's office, and to call in and see him. He will not believe you at second hand."

"Believe what?" asked Hamish.

"That the office had no visitors while you were taking care of it the other day. That money affair grows more mysterious every hour."

"Then I have not the time to go round," exclaimed Hamish in—for him—quite a cross accent. "I don't know anything about the money or the letter. Why should I be bothered?"

"Hamish, you *must* go," said Arthur impressively. "Do you know that—so far as can be ascertained—no human being was in the office alone with the letter save you and I? Were we to shun inquiry, the suspicion might fall upon us."

Hamish drew himself up haughtily, somewhat after the fashion of Roland Yorke. "What absurdity, Arthur! Steal a twenty-pound note!" But when they came to the turning where two roads met, one of which led to Close Street, Hamish had apparently reconsidered his determination.

"I suppose I must go, or the old fellow will be offended. You can tell them at home that I shall be in directly—not to wait dinner."

He walked away quickly. Arthur pursued the path which would take him round the cathedral to the Boundaries. He bent his head in thought; he was lost in perplexity. In spite of what Mr. Galloway urged with regard to the seal, he could not believe but what the money had gone safely to the post-office, and was abstracted afterwards. Thus busied within himself, he had reached the elm trees, when he ran up against Hopper, the bailiff. Arthur looked up, and the man's features relaxed into a smile.

"We shut the door when the steed's stolen, Mr. Arthur," was his salutation. "Now that I have got my pockets emptied of what would have done no good to your brother, I come here to meet him at the right time, just to show folks—should any be about—that I did know my way here, although it unfortunately fell out that I always missed him."

He nodded and winked. Arthur, completely at sea as to his meaning, made some trifling remark in answer.

"He did well to come to terms with them," continued Hopper, dropping his voice. "Though it was but a five pound, as I hear, and a promise for the rest, you see they took it. Ten times over they said to me, 'We don't want to proceed to extremities with Hamish Channing.' I was as glad as could be when they withdrew the writ. I do hope he'll go on smooth and straight, now that he has begun paying up a bit. Tell him old Hopper says it, Mr. Arthur."

Hopper glided on, leaving Arthur glued to the spot. Begun to pay up! Paid five pounds off one debt! Paid (there could be no doubt of it) partially, or wholly, the "enemy" in the proscribed street! What did it mean? Every drop of blood in Arthur Channing's body stood still, and then coursed on with fiery violence. Had he seen the cathedral tower toppling down upon his head, he had feared it less than the awful dread which was dawning upon him.

He went home to dinner. Hamish went home. Hamish was more gay and talkative than usual; Arthur was silent as the grave. What was the matter? some one asked him. His head ached, was the answered plea. And, indeed, it was no false one. Hamish did not say a syllable about the loss at table; neither did Arthur. Arthur's tongue was tied now.

It is useless to attempt to disguise the fear which had fallen upon him. You, my reader, will probably have glanced to it as suspiciously as did Arthur Channing. Until this loophole appeared, the facts had been to Arthur's mind utterly mysterious; they now shone out all too apparent in glaring colours. He knew that he himself had not touched the money, and no one else had been left alone with it except Hamish. Debt! What had the paltry fear of debt and its consequences been, compared to this?

Mr. Galloway talked much of the mystery that afternoon; Yorke talked of it; Jenkins talked of it. Arthur barely answered—never, except when obliged; and his manner, confused at times, for he could not help its being so, excited the attention of Mr. Galloway. "One would think you had helped yourself to the money, Channing!" he crossly exclaimed to him once, when they were alone in the private room.

"No, sir, I did not," Arthur answered in a low tone; but his face flushed scarlet, and then grew deadly pale. If a Channing, his brother, had done it, why, he felt himself almost equally guilty: it dyed his brow with shame. Mr. Galloway noticed the signs, and attributed them to the pain caused by his question.

"Don't be foolish, Arthur. I feel sure of you and Yorke. Though with Yorke's carelessness and his spendthrift habits, I do not know that I should have been so sure of him had he been left alone with the temptation."

"Sir!" exclaimed Arthur in a tone of pain, "Yorke did not touch it. I would answer for his innocence with my life."

"Don't I say I do not suspect him, or you either?" testily returned Mr. Galloway. "It is the mystery of the affair that worries me. If no elucidation turns up between now and to-morrow morning, I shall place it in the hands of the police."

The announcement scared away the precaution of Arthur, nearly scared away his senses.

"Oh! pray, pray, Mr. Galloway, do not let the police become cognizant of it!" he uttered in an accent of wild alarm. And Mr. Galloway stared at him in very amazement; and Jenkins, who had come in to ask a question, stared too.

"It might not be productive of any good result, and would cause us no end of trouble," Arthur added, striving to assign some plausible explanation of his words.

"That is my affair," said Mr. Galloway.

When Arthur reached home, the news had penetrated there. Mrs. Channing's tea-table was absorbed with it. Tom and Charles gave the school version of it, and the Reverend Mr. Yorke, who was taking tea with them, gave his. Both accounts were increased by sundry embellishments, which had never had place in reality.

"Not a soul was ever near the letter," exclaimed Tom, "except Arthur and Jenkins and Roland Yorke."

"The post-office must be to blame for this," observed Mr. Channing. "But you are wrong, Tom, with regard to Jenkins. He could not have been there."

"Mark Galloway says his uncle had a telegraphic dispatch to say the post-office knew nothing about it," exclaimed Charles.

"Much you know about it, Miss Charley!" quoth Tom. "The dispatch was about the seal; it was not from the post-office at all. They have not accused the post-office yet."

Arthur let them talk on, his headache the excuse for his own silence. It did ache in no measured degree. When appealed to, "Was it this way, Arthur?" "Was it the other?" he was obliged to speak, so that an accurate version of the affair was arrived at before tea was over. Constance alone saw that something unusual was the matter with him. She attributed it to fears at the absence of Hamish, who had been expected in to tea, and did not come. Constance's own fears at this absence grew to a terrific height Had he been *arrested?*

She beckoned Arthur from the room; she could no longer control herself. Her lips were white as she drew him into the study and spoke. "Arthur, what has become of Hamish? Has anything happened to him?"

"Happened to him!" repeated Arthur vaguely, too absorbed in his own sad thoughts to reply at once.

"Has—he—been—*taken?*"

"Taken! Hamish? Oh, you mean for debt!" he continued, his heart beating, and fully aroused now. "There is no further fear, I believe. He has managed to arrange with the people."

"How has he contrived it?" exclaimed Constance in wonder.

Arthur turned his face away. "Hamish does not make me his confidant."

Constance stole her hand into his. "Arthur, what is the matter with you this evening? Is it that unpleasant affair at Mr. Galloway's?"

He turned from her. He laid his face upon the table and groaned in anguish. "Be still, be still, Constance! You can do no good."

"But *what* is it?" uttered Constance in alarm. "You surely do not fear that suspicion should be cast on you, or on Hamish—although, as it appears, you and he were alone in the office with the letter?"

"Be still, I say, Constance," he wailed. "There is nothing for it but to—to—to bear. You will do well to ask no more about it."

A faint fear began to dawn upon her. "You and Hamish were alone with the letter!" The echo of the words came thumping against her brain, but she beat it off. Suspect a Channing! "Arthur, I need not ask if you are innocent; it would be a gratuitous insult."

"No," he quietly said, "you need not ask that."

"And—Hamish?" she would have continued, but the words stuck in her throat. She changed them for others.

"How do you know that he has paid any of his debts, Arthur?"

"I heard it. I——"

At that moment they heard something else—Hamish's voice in the hall. In the impulse of the moment, in the glad revulsion of feeling—for if Hamish were safe in the hall, he could not be in prison—Constance flew to him, and clasped her hands round his neck. "O Hamish, Hamish! thank Heaven that you are come!"

Hamish was surprised. He went with Constance into the study, where Arthur had remained. "What do you mean, Constance? What is the matter?"

"I am always fearful," she whispered, "always fearful; I know you owe money, and they might put you in prison. Hamish, I am thinking of it by night and by day."

"My pretty sister!" cried Hamish caressingly, as he smoothed her hair, like Constance sometimes smoothed Annabel's, "that danger has for the present passed."

"If you were arrested, papa might lose his situation," she murmured.

"I know it; it is that which has worried me. I have been doing what I could to avert it. Constance, these things are not for you. Who told you anything about them?"

"Never mind that. I——"

"What will you give me for something I have found?" exclaimed Annabel, bursting in upon them, her hands held behind her and her eyes dancing. "It is one of your treasures, Hamish."

"Then give it to me, Annabel. Come! I am tired; I cannot play with you this evening."

"I won't give it you till you guess what it is."

Hamish was evidently in no mood for play. Annabel danced round and about him, provokingly eluding his grasp. He caught her suddenly, and laid his hands upon hers. With a shriek of laughing defiance she flung something on the floor, and four or five sovereigns rolled about.

It was Hamish's *porte-monnaie.* She had found it on the hall table, by the side of his hat and gloves, left there most probably in inadvertence. Hamish stooped to pick up the money.

"See how rich he is!" danced Annabel—"after telling us he was as poor as a church mouse! Where has he got it from?"

Never had they seen Hamish more annoyed. When he had secured the money, he gave a pretty sharp tap to Annabel, and ordered her, in a tone of ringing command, not to meddle with his things again. He quitted the room, and Annabel ran after him, laughing and defiant still.

"*Where has he got it from?*" The word spoken in innocence by the child rang like a knell on the ears of Constance and Arthur Channing. Constance's very heart turned sick—sick as Arthur's had been since the meeting with Hopper under the elm trees.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. BUTTERBY.

THE cathedral clock of Helstonleigh was striking eight, and the postman was going his rounds through the Boundaries. Formerly nothing so common as a regular postman, when on duty, was admitted within the pale of that exclusive place. The Boundaries, chiefly occupied by the higher order of the clergy, did not condescend to have its letters delivered in the ordinary way and by the ordinary hands. It was the custom for the postman to take them to the Boundary gate, and there put them into the porter's great box, just as if he had been posting letters at the town post-office; and the porter forthwith delivered them at their several destinations. The late porter, however, had grown, with years, half blind and wholly stupid. Some letters he dropped; some he lost; some he delivered at wrong houses; some he persisted in declaring, when questioned, had never been delivered to *him.* In short, the mistakes and confusion were incessant; so the porter was exonerated from that portion of his duty, and the postman entered upon it. There was a fresh porter now, but the old custom had not been resumed.

Ring—ring—ring—ring—for one peculiarity of the Boundaries was that most of its doors possessed no knockers, only bells; on he went, the man, on this morning, leaving letters nearly everywhere. At length he came to Mr. Galloway's, and rang there a peal that it is the delight of a postman to ring; but when the door was opened, he delivered in only one letter and a newspaper. The business letters were generally directed to the office.

Mr. Galloway was half-way through his breakfast. He was no sluggard, and he liked to devote the whole hour, from eight to nine, to his breakfast and his *Times*. Occasionally, as on this morning, he would sit down before eight, so as to get nearly through his breakfast before the postman came. His servants knew by experience that, when this happened, he was expecting something unusual by the post.

His man came in. He laid the letter and the newspaper by his master's side. Mr. Galloway tore open the *Times*, gave one glance at the price of funds and the money article, and then put the paper away and took up the letter.

The latter was from his cousin, Mr. Robert Galloway. It contained, besides the writing, the envelope in which Mr. Galloway had enclosed the twenty-pound note. "You perceive," wrote Mr. Robert, "that the seal has not been tampered with. It is perfectly intact. Hence I infer that you must be in error in supposing you put the note into the letter."

Mr. Galloway examined the envelope closely. His cousin had not broken the seal in opening the letter, but had *cut* the paper above it. He was a methodical man in trifles, Mr. Robert Galloway, and generally did cut his envelopes open. It had been all the better for him had he learnt to be methodical with his money.

"Yes; it is as Robert says," soliloquized Mr. Galloway. "The seal has not been touched since it went out of my hands; therefore the note must have been extracted from the letter previously. Now, who did it?"

He sat, his elbow on the breakfast-table, his chin in his hand, and the envelope lying before him. Apparently he was studying it minutely; in reality he was lost in thought. "It's just like the work of a conjurer!" he presently exclaimed. "Not a strange soul near the place, that I can find out, and yet the bank-note vanishes out of the letter! Notes don't vanish without hands, and I'll do as I said yesterday—consult the police. If anybody can come to the bottom of it, it's Butterby. Had the seal been broken, I should have given it in charge to the post-office to ferret out; the crime would have lain with them, and so must the discovery. As it is, the business is mine."

He wrote a line rapidly in pencil, folded, called in his manservant, and dispatched him with it to the police-station. The station was very near; it was situated on the other side the cathedral, midway between that edifice and the town hall. In ten minutes after the servant had left the house, Mr. Butterby was on his road to it.

Mr. Butterby puzzled Helstonleigh. He was not an inspector, he was not a sergeant, he was not a common officer, and he was never seen in official dress. Who was Mr. Butterby? Helstonleigh wondered. That he had a great deal to do with the police, was one of their staff, and received his pay, was certain; but what his standing might be, and what his peculiar line of duty, they could not tell. Sometimes he was absent from Helstonleigh for months at a time, probably puzzling other towns. Mr. Galloway would have told you he was a detective; but perhaps Mr. Galloway's grounds for the assertion existed but in his own opinion. For convenience' sake we will call him the detective, remembering, however, that we have no warranty for it.

Mr. Butterby came forward—a spare, pale man of middle height, his eyes deeply set in his head, and his nose turned up to the skies. He was of silent habit—probably of a silent nature.

Mr. Galloway recited the circumstances of his loss. The detective sat near, his hands upon his knees, his head bent, and his eyes cast upon the floor. He did not interrupt the story by a single word. When it was ended, he took up the envelope and examined it in equal silence—examined it with ridiculous minuteness, Mr. Galloway thought, for he poked, and peered, and touched it everywhere. He held it up to the light; he studied the post-marks; he gazed at the seal through an odd-looking little glass that he took from his waistcoat pocket; he particularly criticised the folds; he drew his fingers along its edges; he actually smelt it—all in silence, and with a countenance entirely impassive.

"Have you the number of the note?" was his first question.

"No," said Mr. Galloway.

He looked up at this. The thought may have struck him that not to take the number of a bank-note sent by post betrayed some carelessness for a man of business.

Mr. Galloway at least inferred this to have caused the look, and answered it.

"Of course I am in the habit of taking their numbers. I don't know that I ever did such a thing before as send a bank-note away without it. I had an appointment, as I tell you, at the other end of the town for a quarter before three; it was of importance, and when I heard the college strike out the three-quarters—the very hour I ought to have been there—I hurriedly put the note inside the folds of the letter, without waiting to take the number. It was not that I forgot to do so, but that I would not spare the time."

"Have you any means of ascertaining the number, by tracing the note back to whence it may have come into your possession?" was the next question.

Mr. Galloway was obliged to confess that he had not. "Bank-notes are so frequently paid me from different quarters," he remarked. "Yesterday, for instance, a farmer, renting under the dean and chapter, came in and paid me his half-year's rent. Another, holding the lease of a public-house in the town, renewed two lives which had dropped; it was Beard of the Barley Mow. Now both these men paid in notes, tens and fives, and they lie together now in my cash drawer; but I could not tell you which particular notes came from each man—no, not if you paid me the worth of the whole to do it. Neither could I tell whence I had the note which I put into the letter."

"In this way, if a note should turn out to be bad, you could not return it to its owner."

"I never took a bad note in my life," said Mr. Galloway, speaking impulsively. "There's not a better judge of notes than myself in the kingdom; and Jenkins is as good."

Another silence. Mr. Butterby remained in the same attitude, his head and eyes bent. "Have you told me all the particulars?" he presently asked.

"I think so—all that I remember."

"Then allow me to go over them aloud," returned the detective; "and if I make any mistake or omission, have the goodness to correct me:—On Friday last you took a twenty-pound note out of your cash drawer, not taking or knowing its number. This note you put within the folds of a letter, and placed both in an envelope, and fastened the envelope down, your two clerks, Channing and Yorke, being present. You then went out, leaving the letter upon one of the desks. As you left, Hamish Channing came in. Immediately following upon that, Yorke went out, leaving the brothers alone. Arthur departed to attend college, Hamish remaining in the office. Arthur Channing soon returned, finding there was no necessity for him to stay in the cathedral; upon which Hamish left. Arthur Channing remained alone for more than an hour, nobody calling or entering the office during that period. You then returned yourself, found the letter in the same state, apparently, in which you had left it, and you sealed it, and sent Arthur Channing with it to the post-office. These are the brief facts, so far as you are cognizant of them, and as they have been related to you?"

"They are," replied Mr. Galloway. "I should have mentioned that Arthur Channing carried the letter into my private room before he quitted the office for college."

"Locking the door?"

"Oh dear no! Closing the door, no doubt, but not locking it. It would have been unusual to do so."

"Jenkins was away," observed the detective in a tone of abstraction, which told he was holding self-soliloquy, rather than addressing his companion. Mr. Galloway rather fired at the remark, taking it in a light different from that in which it was spoken.

"Jenkins was at home at the time, confined to his bed; and had he not been, I would answer for Jenkins's honesty as I would for my own. Can you see any possible solution of the mystery?"

"A very possible one," was the dry answer. "There is no doubt whatever upon my mind that the theft was committed by Arthur Channing."

Mr. Galloway started up with an exclamation of surprise, mingled with anger. Standing within the room was his nephew Mark. The time had gone on to nine, the hour of release from school; and on running past Mr. Galloway's with the rest of the boys, Mark had dutifully called in. Mark and his brothers were particularly fond of calling in, for their uncle was not stingy with his sixpences, and they were always on the lookout. Master Mark did not get a sixpence this time.

"How dare you intrude upon me in this surreptitious way, sir? Don't you see I am engaged? I will have you knock at my room door before you enter. Take yourself off again, if you please."

Mark, with a word of deprecation, went off, his ears pricking with the sentence he had heard from the detective —Arthur Channing the thief!

Mr. Galloway turned again to the officer. He resented the imputation. "The Channings are altogether above suspicion, from the father downwards," he remonstrated. "Were Arthur Channing dishonestly inclined, he has had the opportunity to rob me long before this."

"Persons of hitherto honourable conduct, honest by nature and by habit, have succumbed under sudden temptation or pressing need," was the answer.

"Arthur Channing is in no pressing need. He is not hard up for money."

A smile actually curled the detective's stoical lip. "A great many more young men are hard up for money than they let appear on the surface. The Channings are in what may be called difficulty, through the failure of their Chancery suit, and the lad must have yielded to temptation."

Mr. Galloway could not be brought to see it. "You may as well set on and suspect Hamish," he resentfully said. "He was equally alone with the letter."

"No," was the answer of the keen officer. "Hamish Channing is in a responsible position; he would not be likely to peril it for a twenty-pound note; and he could not know that the letter contained money." Mr. Butterby was not cognizant of quite the strict facts, you see.

"It is absurd to suspect Arthur Channing."

"Which is the most absurd—to suspect him, or to assume that the bank-note vanished without hands, dried itself up to annihilation, forced its own way through the letter and envelope, and disappeared up the chimney in a whirlwind?" asked the officer, bringing sarcasm to his aid. "If the facts be as they are stated—that only the two Channings had access to the letter—the guilt must lie with one of them. Facts are facts, Mr. Galloway."

Mr. Galloway admitted that facts *were* facts, but he could not be brought to allow the guilt of Arthur Channing. The detective rose.

"You have confided the management of this affair to me," he observed, "and I make no doubt I shall be able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. One more question

I must ask you. Is it known to your clerks that you have not the number of the note?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I fear you stand little chance of ever seeing it again. That fact known, no time would be lost in parting with it; they'd make haste to get it safe off."

Not an instant did Mr. Butterby take for consideration upon quitting Mr. Galloway. With a sharp, unhesitating step, as though his mind had been made up for a month past as to what his course must be, he took his way direct to the house of Mr. Joe Jenkins. That gentleman, his head tied up yet, was just leaving for the office, and Mr. Butterby encountered him coming through the shop.

"Good-morning, Jenkins. I want a word with you alone." Jenkins bowed in his civil, humble fashion; but "a word alone" was more easily asked than had, Mrs. Jenkins being all-powerful, and burning with curiosity. The officer had to exert some authority before he could get rid of her and be left at peace with Jenkins.

"What sources of expense has Arthur Channing?" demanded he, so abruptly as to startle and confuse Jenkins.

"Sources of expense, sir?" he repeated.

"What are his habits? Does he squander money? Does he get out in an evening amidst expensive company?"

"I'm sure, sir, I cannot tell anything about it," Jenkins was mildly beginning. He was imperatively interrupted by the detective.

"I ask *to know*. You are aware that I possess authority to compel you to speak; therefore answer me without excuse or circumlocution; it will save trouble."

"But indeed, sir, I really do *not* know," persisted Jenkins. "I should judge Mr. Arthur Channing to be a steady, well-conducted young gentleman, who has no extravagant habits at all. As to his evenings, I think he spends them mostly at home."

"Do you know whether he has any pressing debts?"

"I heard him say to Mr. Yorke one day that a twenty-pound note would pay all he owed, and leave him something out of it," spoke Jenkins in his unconscious simplicity.

"Ah!" said Mr. Butterby, drawing in his lips, though his face remained impassive as before. "When was this?"

"Not long ago, sir. About a week it may have been, before I met with that accident—which accident, I begin to see now, sir, happened providentially, for it caused me to be away from the office when that money was lost."

"An unpleasant loss," remarked the officer, with apparent carelessness; "and the young gentlemen must feel it so—Arthur Channing especially. Yorke, I believe, was out?"

"He does feel it very much, sir. He was as agitated about it yesterday as could be when Mr. Galloway talked of putting it into the hands of the police. It is a disagreeable thing to have happen in an office, you know, sir."

A slight pause of silence was made by the detective ere he rejoined. "Agitated, was he? And Mr. Roland Yorke the same, no doubt?"

"No, sir; Mr. Roland does not seem to care much about it. He thinks it must have been taken in its transit through the post-office, and I cannot help being of the same opinion, sir."

Another question or two, and Jenkins attended Mr. Butterby to the door. He was preparing to follow him from it, but a peremptory female voice arrested his egress.

"Jenkins, I want you."

"It is hard upon half-past nine, my dear. I shall be late."

"If it's hard upon half-past ten, you'll just walk here. I want you, I say."

Meek as any lamb, Mr. Jenkins returned to the back parlour, and was marshalled into a chair. Mrs. Jenkins closed the door and stood before him. "Now, then, what did Butterby want?"

"I don't know what he wanted," replied Jenkins.

"You will sit there till you tell me," resolutely replied the lady. "I am not going to have police inquisitors making mysterious visits inside my doors and not know what they do it for. You'll tell me every word that passed, and the sooner you begin the better."

"But I am ignorant myself of what it was he did want," mildly deprecated Jenkins. "He asked me a question or two about Mr. Arthur Channing, but why I don't know."

Leaving Mrs. Jenkins to ferret out the questions one by one—which, you may depend upon it, she would not fail to do, and to keep Jenkins a prisoner until it was over—and leaving Mr. Butterby to proceed to the house of the cathedral organist, whither he was now bent, to ascertain whether Mr. Williams did take the organ voluntarily, and (to Arthur) unexpectedly, that past Friday afternoon, we will go on to other matters. Mr. Butterby best knew what bearing this could have upon the case. Police officers sometimes give to their inquiries a strangely wide range.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN INTERRUPTED DINNER.

Have you ever observed a large lake on the approach of a sudden storm — its unnatural stillness, so deathlike and ominous; its underflow of angry risings, which you know are gathering there, though not yet apparent on the surface; its dull, booming sound, as of a warning whisper, and then the angry bursting forth of fury when the storm has come?

Not inaptly might the cloisters of Helstonleigh be compared to such that day when the college boys were let out of school at one o'clock. A strange rumour had been passed about amid the desks—not reaching that at which sat the seniors—a rumour which shook the equanimity of the school to its centre; and when one o'clock struck, the boys, instead of clattering out with all the noise of which their legs and lungs were capable, stole down the stairs in quiet, and formed into groups of whisperers in the cloisters. It was the ominous calm that precedes a storm.

So very unusual a state of affairs was noticed by the senior boy. "What's up now?" he asked them in the free phraseology in vogue there and elsewhere. "Are you all going to a funeral? I hope it's your sins that you are about to bury!"

A heavy silence answered him. Gaunt could not make it out. The other three seniors, attracted by the scene, came back and waited with Gaunt. By that time the calm was being broken by low murmurings, just like the first threatened rising of the stormy waters, and certain distinct words came from more than one of the groups.

"What do you say?" burst forth Tom Channing, darting forward as the words caught his ear. "You, Jackson—speak up; *what* is it?"

Not Jackson's voice in particular, but several other voices arose then—a word from one, a word from another, half sentences, disjointed hints, forming together an unmistakable whole. "The theft of old Galloway's bank-note has been traced to Arthur Channing."

"Who says it? Who dares to say it?" flashed Tom, his face on fire and his hand clenched.

"The police say it. Butterby says it."

"I don't care for the police; I don't care for Butterby," cried Tom, stamping his foot in his terrible indignation. "I ask, Who dares to say it here?"

"I do, then! Come, Mr. Channing, though you are a senior, and can put me up to Pye for punishment upon any false plea that you choose," answered a tall fellow, Pierce senior, who was chiefly remarkable for getting into fights, and was just now unusually friendly with Mark Galloway, at whose desk he sat.

Quick as lightning Tom Channing turned and faced him. "Speak out what you have to say," cried he; "no hints."

"Whew!" retorted Pierce senior, "d'ye think I am afraid? I say that Arthur Channing stole the note lost by old Galloway."

Tom, in his uncontrollable temper, raised his hand and struck him. One half-minute's struggle, nothing more, and Pierce senior was sprawling on the ground, while Tom Channing's cheek and nose were bleeding. Gaunt had stepped between them.

"I stop this," he said. "Pierce, get up! don't lie there like a floundering donkey.—Channing, what possessed you to forget yourself?"

"You would have done the same, Gaunt, had the insult been offered to you. Let the fellow retract his words or prove them."

"Very good. That is how you ought to have met it at first," said Gaunt.—"Now, Mr. Pierce, can you make good your assertion?"

Pierce had floundered up, and was rubbing one of his long legs, which had got doubled under him in the fall, while his brother, Pierce junior, was collecting an armful of scattered books, and whispering prognostications of parental vengeance in prospective; for so sure as Pierce senior got into a fight at school, to the damage of his face or his clothes, so sure was it followed up by punishment at home.

"If you want proof, go to Butterby at the police place, and get it from him," sullenly replied Pierce, who was of a sulky temper as well as a pugnacious one.

"Look here," interrupted Mark Galloway, springing to the front; "Pierce was a fool to bring it out in that way, but I'll speak up now it has come to this. I went into my uncle's this morning at nine o'clock, and there was he, shut in with Butterby. Butterby was saying that there was no doubt the theft had been committed by Arthur Channing. Mind, Channing," Mark added, turning to Tom, "I am not seconding the accusation on my own score; but that Butterby said it I'll declare."

"Pshaw! is that all?" cried Tom Channing, lifting his head with a haughty gesture, and not condescending to notice the blood which trickled from his cheek. "You must have misunderstood him, boy."

"No, I did not," replied Mark Galloway. "I heard him as plainly as I hear you now."

"It is hardly likely Butterby would say that before you, Galloway," observed Gaunt.

"Ah, but he did not see I was there, or my uncle either," said Mark. "When he is reading his newspaper of a morning he can't bear a noise, and I go into the room always as quiet as mischief. He turned me out again pretty quick, I can tell you, but not till I had heard Butterby say that."

"You must have misunderstood," returned Gaunt, carelessly taking up Tom Channing's notion; "and you had no right to blurt out such a thing to the school. Arthur Channing is better known and trusted than you, Mr. Mark."

"I didn't accuse Arthur Channing to the school. I only repeated to my desk what Butterby said."

"It is that 'only repeating' which does three parts of the mischief in this world," said Gaunt, giving the boys a little touch of morality gratis, to their intense edification. "As to you, Pierce senior, you'll get more than you bargain for some of these days if you poke your ill-conditioned nose so often into other people's business."

Tom Channing had strode away towards his home, his head erect, his step ringing firmly and proudly on the cloister flags. Charley ran by his side. But Charley's face was white, and Tom caught sight of it.

"What are you looking like that for?"

"Tom, you don't think it's true, do you?"

Tom turned his scorn upon the boy. "You uncommon idiot! True! A Channing turn thief! *You* may, perhaps—it's best known to yourself—but never Arthur."

"I don't mean that. I mean, Can it be true that the police suspect him?"

"Oh, that's what your face becomes milk for? You ought to have been born a girl, Miss Charley. If the police do suspect him, what of that? They'll only get the tables turned upon themselves. Butterby might come out and say he suspects me of murder! Should I care? No; I'd prove my innocence, and make him eat his words."

They were drawing near home. Charley looked up at his brother. "You must wipe your face, Tom."

Tom took out his handkerchief and gave his face a rub. In his indignation, his carelessness, he would have done nothing of the sort, had he not been reminded by the boy. "Is it off?"

"Yes, it's off. I am not sure but it will break out again. You must take care."

"Oh, bother! let it. I should like to have polished off that Pierce senior as he deserves. Some coin of the same sort would do Galloway no harm. Were I senior of the school, and Arthur not my brother, Mr. Mark should hear a little home truth about sneaks. I'll tell it him in private as it is; but I can't put him up for punishment, or act in it as Gaunt could."

"Arthur is our brother, therefore we feel it more pointedly than Gaunt can," sensibly remarked Charley.

"I'd advise you not to spell forth that sentimental rubbish, though you are a young lady," retorted Tom. "A senior boy, if he does his duty, should make every boy's cause his own, and 'feel' for him."

"Tom," said the younger and more thoughtful of the two, "don't let us say anything of this at home."

"Why not?" asked Tom hotly. He would have run in open-mouthed.

"It would pain mamma to hear it."

"Boy, do you suppose *she* would fear Arthur?"

"You seem to misconstrue all I say, Tom. Of course she would not fear him—you did not fear him; but it stung you, I know, as was proved by your knocking down Pierce."

"Well, I won't speak of it before her," conciliated Tom, somewhat mollified, "or before my father either; but catch me keeping it from the rest."

As Charles had partially foretold, they had barely entered when Tom's face again became ornamented with crimson. Annabel shrieked out, startling Mr. Channing on his sofa. Mrs. Channing, as it happened, was not present; Constance was. Lady Augusta Yorke and her daughters were spending part of the day in the country, therefore Constance had come home at twelve.

"Look at Tom's face!" cried the child. "What has he been doing? Look! look! it will drop on to his shirt!"

"Hold your tongue, little stupid," returned Tom, hastily bringing his handkerchief into use again; which, being a white one, made the worst sight of the two with its bright red stains. "It's nothing but a scratch."

But Annabel's eyes were sharp, and she had taken full view of the hurt. "Tom, you have been fighting! I am sure of it!"

"Come to me, Tom," said Mr. Channing. "Have you been fighting?" he demanded, as Tom crossed the room in obedience and stood close to him. "Take your handkerchief away that I may see your face."

"It could not be called a fight, papa," said Tom, holding his cheek so that the light from the window fell full upon the hurt. "One of the boys offended me; I hit him, and he gave me this; then I knocked him down, and there it ended. It's only a scratch."

"Thomas, was this Christian conduct?"

"I don't know, papa. It was schoolboy's."

Mr. Channing could not forbear a smile. "I know it was a schoolboy's conduct—that is bad enough; and it is my son's—that is worse."

"If I had given him what he deserved, he would have got ten times as much; and perhaps I should, for my temper was up, only Gaunt put in his interference. When I am senior, my policy of rule will be different from what Gaunt's is."

"Ah, Tom, your 'temper up'! It is that temper of yours which brings you harm. What was the quarrel about?"

"I would rather not tell you, papa. Not for my own sake," he added, turning his honest eyes fearlessly on his father; "but I could not tell it without betraying something about somebody which it may be as well to keep in."

"After that lucid explanation you had better go and get some warm water for your face," said Mr. Channing. "I will speak with you later."

Constance followed him from the room, volunteering to procure the warm water. They were standing in Tom's chamber afterwards, Tom bathing his face and Constance looking on, when Arthur, who had then come in from Mr. Galloway's, passed by to his own room.

"Hallo!" he called out; "what's the matter, Tom?"

"Such a row!" answered Tom. "And I wish I could have pitched into Pierce senior as I'd have liked. What do you think, Arthur? The school were taking up the notion that you—you had stolen old Galloway's bank-note. Pierce senior set it agate—that is, he and Mark Galloway together. Mark said a word, and Pierce said two, and so it went on. I should have paid Pierce out but for Gaunt."

A silence. It was filled up by the sound of Tom splashing the water on his face, and by that only. Arthur spoke presently, his tone so calm a one as to be almost unnatural.

"How did the notion arise?"

"Mark Galloway said he heard Butterby talking with his uncle; that Butterby said the theft could only have been committed by Arthur Channing. Mark Galloway's ears must have played him false; but it was a regular sneak's trick to come and repeat it for fact in the school.—I say, Constance, is my face clean now?"

Constance woke up from a reverie to look at his face. "Quite clean," she answered.

He dried it, dried his hands, gave a glance at his shirt front in the glass, which had, however, escaped damage, brushed his hair, and went downstairs. Arthur closed the door and turned to Constance. Her eyes were seeking his, and her lips stood apart. The terrible fear which had fallen upon them both the previous day had not yet been spoken out between them. It must be spoken now.

"Constance, there is tribulation before us," he whispered. "We must school ourselves to bear it, however difficult the task may prove. Whatever betide the rest of us, suspicion must be averted from *him*."

"What tribulation do you mean?" she gasped.

"The affair has been placed in the hands of the police; and I believe—I believe"—Arthur spoke with agitation—"that they will publicly investigate it. Constance, they suspect *me*. The college school is right, and Tom is wrong."

Constance leaned against a chest of drawers to steady herself, and pressed her hand upon her shrinking face. "How have you learnt it?"

"I have gathered it from different trifles—one fact and another. Jenkins said Butterby was with him this morning asking questions about me. Better that I should be suspected than Hamish. God help me to bear it!"

"But it is so unjust that you should suffer for him."

"Were it traced home to him, it might be the whole family's ruin, for my father would inevitably lose his place. He might lose it were only suspicion to stray to Hamish. There is no alternative. I must screen him. Can you be firm, Constance, when you see me accused?"

Constance leaned her head upon her hand, wondering whether she could be firm in the cause. But that she knew where to go for strength, she might have doubted it; for the love of right, the principles of justice were strong within her. "Oh, what could possess him?" she uttered, wringing her hands, "what could possess him? Arthur, is there not a loophole, not the faintest loophole to hope in his innocence?"

"None that I see. No one whatever had access to the letter but Hamish and I. He must have yielded to the temptation in a moment of delirium, knowing the money would clear him from some of his pressing debts—as it has done."

"How could he brave the risk of detection?"

"I don't know. My head aches, pondering over it. I suppose he concluded that the suspicion would fall upon the post-office. It would have fallen on it but for that seal placed on the letter afterwards. What an unfortunate thing it was that Roland Yorke mentioned there was money inside the letter in the hearing of Hamish!"

"Did he mention it?" exclaimed Constance.

"He said there was a twenty-pound note in the letter going to the cousin Galloway, and Hamish remarked that he wished it was going into his pocket instead. I *wish*," Arthur uttered in a sort of frenzy, "I had locked the letter up there and then."

Constance clasped her hands in pain. "I fear he may have been going wrong for some time," she breathed. "It has come to my knowledge, through Judith, that he sits up for hours, night after night, doing something to the books. Arthur," she shivered, glancing fearfully round, "I hope those accounts are right?"

The doubt thus given utterance to blanched even the cheeks of Arthur. "Sits up at the books!" he exclaimed.

"He sits up, that is certain; and at the books, as I conclude. He takes them into his room at night. It may only be that he has not time, or does not make time, to go over them in the day. It *may* be."

"I trust it is; I pray it may be. Mind you, Constance, our duty is plain, to screen him—to screen him at any sacrifice to ourselves, for the father and mother's sake."

"Sacrifice to you, you ought to say. Oh, what were our other light troubles compared with this? Arthur, will they publicly accuse you?"

"It may come. I have been steeling myself all the morning to meet it."

He looked into her face as he said it. Constance could see how his brow and heart were aching. At that moment they were called to dinner, and Arthur turned to leave the room. Constance caught his hand, the tears raining from her eyes.

"Arthur," she whispered, "in the very darkest trouble God can comfort us. Be assured He will comfort you."

Hamish did not make his appearance at dinner, and they sat down without him. This was not so very unusual as to cause surprise; he was occasionally detained at the office.

The meal was about half over when Annabel, in her disregard of the bounds of discipline, suddenly started from her seat and flew to the window.

"Charley, here are two policemen coming here! Whatever can they want?"

"Perhaps to take you," said Mrs. Channing jestingly. "A short sojourn at the treadmill might be of great service to you, Annabel."

The announcement had struck upon the ear and memory of Tom. "Policemen!" he exclaimed, standing up in his place, and stretching his neck on high to obtain a view of them. "Why—it never can be that—old Butterby—Arthur, what ails you?"

A sensitive, refined nature, be it implanted in man or woman, is almost sure to betray its emotions on the countenance. Such a nature was Arthur Channing's. Now that the dread had really come, every drop of blood forsook his cheeks and lips, leaving his face altogether of a ghastly whiteness. He was utterly unable to control or help this, and it was this pallor which had given rise to Tom's concluding exclamation.

Mr. Channing looked at Arthur, Mrs. Channing looked at him; they all looked at him except Constance, and she bent her head lower over her plate, to hide, as she best might, her own white face and its shrinking terror. "Are you ill, Arthur?" inquired his father.

A low, brief reply came, one struggling for calmness. "No, sir."

Impetuous Tom, forgetting caution, forgetting all save the moment actually present, gave utterance to more than was expedient. "Arthur, you are never fearing what those wretched schoolboys said? The police are not come to arrest you. Butterby wouldn't be such a fool!"

But the police were in the hall, and Judith had come to the dining-room door. "Master Arthur, you are wanted, please."

"What is all this?" exclaimed Mr. Channing in astonishment, gazing from Tom to Arthur, from Arthur to the vision of the blue official dress, a glimpse of which he could catch beyond Judith. Tom took up the answer.

"It's nothing, papa. It's a trick they are playing for fun, I'll lay. They *can't* really suspect Arthur of stealing the bank-note, you know. They'd never dare to take him up like they take a felon."

Charley stole round to Arthur with a wailing cry, and threw his arms round him, as if their weak protection could retain him in its shelter. Arthur gently unwound them, and bent down till his lips touched the yearning face held up to him in its anguish.

"Charley, boy, I am innocent," he breathed in the boy's ear. "Don't keep me. They have come for me, and I must go with them."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ESCORT TO THE GUILDHALL.

THE group would have formed a study for the painter Wilkie — the arrested dinner; the consternation of those assembled at it: Mr. Channing (whose sofa, wheeled to the table, took up the end opposite his wife) gazing around with a puzzled, stern expression; Mrs. Channing glancing behind her with a sense of undefined dread; the pale, *conscious* countenances of Arthur and Constance; Tom standing up in haughty impetuosity, defiant of everybody; the lively terror of Charley's face as he clung to Arthur; and the wide-opened eyes of Annabel, expressive of nothing but surprise—for it took a vast deal to alarm that careless young lady—while at the door, holding it open for Arthur, stood Judith in her mobcap, full of curiosity; and behind her the two policemen — a scene, indeed, that Wilkie, in the zenith of his power, would have rejoiced to paint.

Arthur, battling fiercely with his outraged pride, and breathing an inward hope for strength to go through with his task, for patience to endure, put Charley from him, and went into the hall. He saw not what was immediately around him—the inquiring looks of his father and mother, the necessity of some explanation to them; he saw not Judith and her curious face. A scale was, as it were, before his eyes, blinding them to all outward influences save one—the officers of justice standing there, and the purpose for which they had come. "What on earth has happened, Master Arthur?" whispered Judith as he passed her, terrifying the old servant with his pale, scared face. But he neither heard nor answered; he walked straight up to the men.

"I will go with you quietly," he said to them in an undertone. "Do not make a disturbance to alarm my mother."

We cannot always have our senses about us, as the phrase goes. Some of us, I fear, enjoy that privilege but rarely, and the very best lose them on occasions. But that Arthur Channing was totally uncollected, he would not have pursued a line of conduct in that critical moment which was liable to be construed into an admission or at least a consciousness of guilt. In his anxiety to avert suspicion from Hamish, he lost sight of the precautions necessary to guard himself so far as was practicable. And yet he had spent time that morning thinking over what his manner, his bearing must be if it came to this! Had it come upon him unexpectedly, he would have met it very differently—with far less of outward calmness, but most probably with indignant denial. "I will go with you quietly," he said to the men.

"All right, sir," they answered, with a knowing nod, and a conviction that he was a cool hand and a guilty one.

"It's always best not to resist the law—it never does no good."

He need not have resisted, but he ought to have waited until they asked him to go. A dim perception of this had already begun to steal over him. He was taking his hat from its place in the hall when the voice of Mr. Channing came ringing on his ear.

"Arthur, what is this? Give me an explanation."

Arthur turned back to the room, passing through the sea of faces to get there; for all, save his helpless father, had come from their seats to gather round and about that strange mystery in the hall, to try to fathom it. Mr. Channing gave one long, keen glance at Arthur's face, which was very unlike Arthur's usual face just then, for all its candour seemed to have gone out of it. He did not speak to him; he called in one of the men.

"Will you tell me your business here?" he asked courteously.

"Don't you know it, sir?" was the reply.

"No, I do not," replied Mr. Channing.

"Well, sir, it's an unpleasant accusation as is brought against this young gentleman. But perhaps he'll be able to make it clear. I hope he will. It don't give us no pleasure when folks is convicted, especially young ones, and those we have always known for respectable; we'd rather see 'em let off."

Tom interrupted—Tom, in his fiery indignation. "Is it of stealing that bank-note lost by Galloway that you presume to accuse my brother?" he asked, speaking indistinctly in his haste and passion.

"You have said it, sir," replied the man. "That's it."

"Then I say that whoever accuses him ought to be——"

"Silence, Thomas," interrupted Mr. Channing. "Allow me to deal with this. Who brings this accusation against my son?"

"We got our orders from Mr. Butterby, sir. He is acting for Mr. Galloway. He was called in there early this morning."

"Have you come for my son to go with you to Mr. Galloway's?"

"Not there, sir. We have got to take him straight to the Guildhall. The magistrates are waiting to hear the case."

A dismayed pause. Even Mr. Channing's heart, with all its implicit faith in the truth and honour of his children, beat as if it would burst its bounds. Tom's beat too, but it was with a desire to "pitch into" the policemen as he had pitched into Pierce senior in the cloisters.

Mr. Channing turned to Arthur. "You have an answer to this, my son?"

The question was not replied to. Mr. Channing spoke again with the same calm emphasis: "Arthur, you can vouch for your innocence?"

Arthur Channing did the very worst thing that he could have done—he hesitated. Instead of replying readily and firmly "I can," which he might have done without harm arising, he stopped to ask himself how far, consistent with safety to Hamish, he might defend his own cause. His mind was not collected; he had not, as I have said, his senses about him; and the unbroken silence, waiting for his answer, the expectant faces turned upon him, helped to confuse him and to scare his reason further away. The signs, which certainly did look like signs of guilt, struck a knell on the heart of his father. "Arthur!" he wailed out in a tone of intense agony, "you *are* innocent?"

"Y—es," replied Arthur, gulping down his rising breath, his rising words. Impassioned words of exculpation, of innocence, of truth, they had bubbled up within him, were hovering on the tip of his impatient tongue, on the verge of his burning lips. He did beat them down again and swallow them, but he never knew afterwards how he did it.

Better that he had been still silent than speak that dubious, indecisive "Y—es." It told terribly against him. One conscious of his own innocence does not proclaim it in indistinct, shuffling words. Tom's mouth dropped with dismay, and his astonished eyes seemed as if they could not take themselves off Arthur's vacillating face. Mrs. Channing staggered against the wall with a faint cry.

The policeman spoke up; he meant to be friendly. In all Helstonleigh there was not a family more respected than were the Channings, and the man felt a passing sorrow for his task. "I wouldn't ask no questions, sir, if I was you. Sometimes it's best not; they tell against the accused."

"The time's up," called out the one who was in the hall to his fellow. "We can't stop here all day."

The hint was taken at once, both by Arthur and the man. Constance had kept herself still throughout by main force, but Mrs. Channing could not see him go away like this. She rose and threw her arms round him in a burst of hysterical feeling, sobbing out, "My boy! my boy!"

"Don't, mother — don't unnerve me," he whispered. "It is bad enough as it is."

"But you cannot be guilty, Arthur?"

For answer he looked straight into her eyes for a single moment. His habitual expression had come back to them again—the earnest of confiding truth, which she had ever known and trusted. It spoke calm to her heart now. "You are innocent," she murmured. "Then go in peace."

Annabel broke into a loud storm of shrieks and sobs. "O Judith! will they hang him? will they hang him? What is it that he has done?"

"I'd hang them two policemen if I did what I should like to do," responded Judith.—"Yes, you two, I mean," she added with scant ceremony as the officials turned round at the words. "If I had my will, I'd hang you both up to two of them elm trees yonder, right in front of one another. Coming to a gentleman's house on this errand!"

"Do not drag me through the streets ignominiously," said Arthur to his keepers. "I give you my word to make no resistance. I will go to the Guildhall, or anywhere else that you please, as freely as if I were bound thither on my own pleasure. You need not let it be seen that I am in custody."

They saw that they might trust him. One of the policemen went over to the opposite side of the way, as if pacing his beat; the other continued by the side of Arthur, not so closely—not to cause suspicion in those they met. A few paces from the door Tom Channing came pelting up and put his arm within Arthur's.

"Guilty or not guilty, it shall never be said a Channing was deserted by his brothers!" quoth he. "I wish Hamish could have been here."

"Tom, you are thinking me guilty?" Arthur said in a quiet tone, which did not reach the ears of his official escort.

"Well, I am in a maze," avowed Tom. "If you are guilty, I shall never believe in anything again. I have always thought that building there a cathedral—well and good; but if it turns out to be a house, I shan't be surprised after this. *Are* you guilty?"

"No, lad."

The refutation was simple, and calmly expressed; but there was sufficient in his tone to make Tom Channing's heart give a great leap within him.

"Thank God! What a fool I was! But, I say, Arthur, why did you not deny it out and out? Your manner frightened us. I suppose the police scared you?"

Tom, all right now, walked along, his head up, escorting Arthur with as little shame to the public examination as he would have done to be publicly crowned. It was not the humiliation of undeserved contumely that could daunt the Channings: the consciousness of guilt could alone effect that. Hitherto, neither guilt nor its shadow had fallen upon them.

"Tom," asked Arthur, when they reached the hall and were about to enter, "will you do me a little service?"

"Won't I, though? What is it?"

"Make the best of your way to Mr. Williams's, and tell him I am prevented taking the organ this afternoon."

"I shan't tell him the reason," said Tom.

"Why not? In an hour's time it will be known from one end of Helstonleigh to the other."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EXAMINATION.

THE magistrates sat on the bench in the town hall of Helstonleigh. But previous to the case being called in (for the police had spoken too fast in saying they were waiting for it), Arthur became acquainted with one great fact—that it was not Mr. Galloway who had pushed matters to this extremity. Neither was he aware that Arthur had been taken into custody. Mr. Butterby had assumed the responsibility and acted upon it. Mr. Butterby, since his interview with Mr. Galloway in the morning, had gathered, as he believed, sufficient corroborating facts to establish, or nearly so, the guilt of Arthur Channing. He supposed that this was all Mr. Galloway required to remove his objection to harsh measures, and in procuring the warrant for the capture Mr. Butterby had acted as for Mr. Galloway.

When Arthur was placed in the spot where he had often seen criminals standing, his face again wore the livid hue which had overspread it in his home. In a few moments this had changed to crimson; brow and cheeks were glowing with it. It was a painful situation, and Arthur felt it to the very depths of his naturally proud spirit. I don't think you or I should have liked it.

The circumstances were stated to the magistrates just as they have been stated to you. The placing of the bank-note and letter in the envelope by Mr. Galloway, his immediately fastening it down by means of the gum, the abstraction of the note between that time and the period when the seal was placed on it later in the day, and the fact that Arthur Channing alone had access to it. "Except Mr. Hamish Channing for a few minutes," Mr. Butterby added, "who kindly remained in the office while his brother proceeded as far as the cathedral and back again—the other clerks, Joseph Jenkins and Roland Yorke, being absent that afternoon."

A deeper dye flushed Arthur's face when Hamish's name and share in the afternoon's doings were mentioned, and he bent his eyes on the floor at his feet and kept them there. Had Hamish not been implicated, he would have stood there comparatively free, with a clear eye and a serene brow. It was that—the all too consciousness of the sin of Hamish—which took the spirit out of him, and drove him to stand there as one under the brand of guilt. He scarcely dared look up, lest it should be read in his countenance that he was innocent and Hamish guilty; he scarcely dared to pronounce, in ever so faltering a tone, the avowal, "I did it not." Had it been to save his life from the scaffold, he could not have spoken out boldly and freely that day. There was the bitter shock of the crime, felt for Hamish's own sake—Hamish, whom they had all so loved, so looked up to; and there was the dread of the consequences to Mr. Channing in the event of discovery. Had the penalty been hanging, I believe that Arthur would have gone to it rather than betray Hamish. But you must not suppose he did not *feel* it for himself: there were moments when he feared lest he should not carry it through.

Mr. Butterby was waiting for a witness—Mr. Galloway himself; and meanwhile he entertained the bench with certain scraps, anecdotal and the like, premising what would be proved before them. Jenkins would show that the prisoner had avowed in his presence it would take a twenty-pound note to clear him from his debts, or hard upon it——

"No," interrupted the hitherto silent prisoner, to the surprise of those present, "that is not true. It is correct that I did make use of words to that effect, but I spoke them in jest. I and Roland Yorke were one day speaking of debts, and I jokingly said a twenty-pound note would pay mine, and leave me something out of it. Jenkins was present, and he may have supposed I spoke in earnest. In point of fact, I did not owe anything."

It was an assertion more easily made than proved. Arthur Channing might have large liabilities upon him for all that appeared in that court to the contrary. Mr. Butterby handed the seal to the bench, who examined it curiously.

"I could have understood this case better had any stranger or strangers approached the letter," observed one of the magistrates, who knew the Channings personally and greatly respected their high character. "You are sure you are not mistaken in supposing nobody came in?" he added, looking kindly at Arthur.

"Certainly no one came in whilst I was alone in the office, sir," was the unhesitating answer.

The gentleman spoke in an undertone to those beside him. "That avowal is in his favour. Had he taken the note, one might suppose he would be anxious to have it appear that strangers did enter, so as to throw the suspicion off himself."

"I have made very close inquiry, and cannot find that the office was entered at all that afternoon," observed Mr. Butterby. Mr. Butterby *had* made close inquiry; and to do him justice, he did not seek to throw one shade of guilt upon Arthur more than he deemed the case warranted. "Mr. Hamish Channing also——"

Mr. Butterby stopped. There, standing within the door, was Hamish himself. In passing along the street he had seen an unusual commotion around the town hall, and upon inquiring its cause, was told that Arthur Channing was under examination on suspicion of having stolen the bank-note lost by Mr. Galloway.

To look at Hamish you would have believed him innocent and unconscious as the day. He strode into the justice-room, his eye flashing, his brow haughty, his colour high. Never had gay Hamish looked so scornfully indignant. He threw his glance round the crowded court in search of Arthur, and it found him.

Their eyes met. A strange gaze it was, going out from the one to the other—a gaze which the brothers had never in all their lives exchanged. Arthur's spoke of shame all too palpably—he could not help it in that bitter moment—shame for his brother. And Hamish shrank under it. If ever one cowered visibly in this world, Hamish Channing did then. A low, suppressed cry went up from Arthur's heart; whatever fond, faint doubt may have lingered on his mind, it died out from that moment.

Others noticed the significant, prolonged look exchanged between them; but they, not in the secret, saw only, on the part of Hamish, what they took to be vexation at his brother's position. It was suggested that it would save time to take the evidence of Mr. Hamish Channing at once. Mr. Galloway's might be received later.

"What evidence?" demanded Hamish, standing before the magistrates in a cold, uncompromising manner, and speaking in a cold, uncompromising tone. "I have none to give. I know nothing of the affair."

"Not much, we are aware; but what little you do know must be spoken, Mr. Hamish Channing."

They did not swear him. These were but informal, preliminary proceedings. Country courts of law and justice are not always conducted according to the orthodox rules, even that of Helstonleigh. There would be another and a more formal examination previous to the committal of the prisoner for trial, if committed he should be.

A few unimportant questions were put to Hamish, and then he was asked whether he saw the letter in question.

"I saw a letter which I suppose to have been the one," he replied. "It was addressed to Mr. Robert Galloway, at Ventnor."

"Did you observe your brother take it into Mr. Galloway's private room?"

"Yes," answered Hamish. "In putting the desks to rights before departing for college, my brother carried the letter into Mr. Galloway's room and left it there. I distinctly remember his doing so."

"Did you see the letter after that?"

"No."

"How long did you remain alone while your brother was away?"

"I did not look at my watch," crabbedly returned Hamish, who had spoken in a resentful tone throughout, as if some great wrong were being inflicted upon him in having to speak at all.

"But you can guess at the time?"

"No, I can't," shortly retorted Hamish. "And 'guesses' are not evidence."

"Was it ten minutes?"

"It may have been. I know he seemed to be back almost as soon as he had gone."

"Did any person—clerk, or stranger, or visitor, or otherwise—come into the office during his absence from it?"

"No."

"No person whatever?"

"No person whatever. I think," continued Hamish, volunteering an opinion upon the subject, although he knew it was out of all rule and precedent to do so, "that there is a vast deal of unprofitable fuss being made about the matter. The money must have been lost in its transit through the post; it is impossible to suppose otherwi——"

Hamish was stopped by a commotion. Clattering along the outer hall, and bursting in at the court door, his black hair awry, his usually pale cheeks streaked with scarlet, his nostrils working with excitement, came Roland Yorke. He was in a state of fierce emotion. Learning, as he had done by accident, that Arthur had been arrested upon the charge, he took up the cause hotly, gave vent to a burst of passionate indignation (in which he abused everybody under the sun save Arthur), and tore off to the town hall. Elbowing the crowd roughly right and left in his impetuosity, pushing one policeman here and another yonder who would have impeded his path, he came up to Arthur, and ranged himself by his side, linking his arm within his in an outburst of kindly generosity.

"Old fellow, who has done this?"

"Mr. Roland Yorke!" exclaimed the bench indignantly. "What do you mean by this behaviour? Stand away, if you please, sir."

"I'll stand away when Arthur Channing stands away," retorted Yorke, apparently ignoring whose presence he was in. "Who accuses him? Mr. Galloway does not.—This is your doing, Butterby."

"Take care that their worships don't commit you for contempt of court," retorted Mr. Butterby. "You are going on for it, Roland Yorke."

"Let them commit me if they will," foamed Roland.

"I am not going to see a friend falsely accused and not stand up for him. Channing no more touched that money than any of you did. The post-office must have had it."

"A moment, Mr. Roland Yorke, if you can calm yourself sufficiently to answer as a rational being," interposed the magistrate who had addressed Arthur. "Have you any proof to urge in support of your assertion that the prisoner did not touch it?"

"Proof, sir!" returned Roland, subsiding, however, into a tone of more respect. "Does it want commonplace proof to establish the innocence of Arthur Channing? Every action of his past life is a proof. He is honest as the day."

"This warm feeling does you credit in one sense——"

"It does me no credit at all," fiercely interrupted Roland. "I don't defend him because he is my friend; I don't defend him because we are in the same office, and sit side by side at the same desk. I do it because I know him to be innocent."

"How do you know it?"

"He *could* not be guilty. He is incapable of it. Better accuse me, or Jenkins, than accuse him!"

"You and Jenkins were not at the office during the suspected time."

"Well, I know we were not," acknowledged Roland, dropping his voice to a more reasonable tone. "And just because it happened, by some cross-grained luck, that Channing was, Butterby pitches on him, and accuses him of the theft. He never did it; and I'll say it with my last breath."

With some trouble—threatenings on the part of the court, and more bursts of explosion from himself—Mr. Roland Yorke was persuaded to retire. He got as far as the back of the room, and there he indulged in undercurrents of wrath, touching injustice and Mr. Butterby, to a select circle who gathered round him. Warm-hearted and generous by fits and starts was Roland Yorke; he had inherited it with his Irish blood from Lady Augusta.

But, meanwhile, where was Mr. Galloway? He did not make his appearance, and it was said he could not be found. Messenger after messenger was dispatched to his office, to his house; and at length Mr. Butterby went himself. All in vain; his servants knew nothing about him. Jenkins, who had the office to himself, thought he must be "somewhere in the town," as he had not said he was going out of it. Mr. Butterby went back crestfallen, and confessed that, not to take up longer the time of their worships unnecessarily, the case must be remanded to the morrow.

"We will take bail," said the magistrates, before the application was made. "One surety will be sufficient—fifty pounds."

At that Mr. Roland, who by this time was standing in a sullen manner against a pillar of the court, his violence gone, and biting his nails moodily, made a rush to the front again, heeding little whom he knocked down in the process. "I'll be bail," he cried eagerly—"that is, Lady Augusta will, as I am not a householder. I'll hunt her up and bring her here."

He was turning in his impetuous haste to "hunt up" Lady Augusta when Hamish Channing imperatively waved to him to be still, and spoke to the bench.

"My father's security will be sufficient, I presume?"

"Quite so."

Since Mr. Channing's incapacity, power to sign and to act for him had been vested in Hamish, and the matter was concluded forthwith. The court poured out its crowds. Hamish was on the point of taking Arthur's arm, but was pushed aside by Roland Yorke, who seized upon it as if he could never make enough of him.

"The miserable idiots! to bring such a charge against you, Arthur! I have been half mad ever since I heard of it."

"Thank you, Yorke. You are very kind——"

"'Kind!' Don't talk that schoolgirl rubbish!" passionately interrupted Roland. "If I were taken up upon a false charge, wouldn't you stand by me?"

"That I would, were it false or true."

"I'll pay that Butterby out, if it's ten years hence! And you, knowing your own innocence, could stand before them there, meek-faced as a tame cat, letting Butterby and the bench have it their own way! A calm temper, such as yours, Arthur, may be very—what do they call it?—Christian, but I'm blest if it's useful! I should have made their ears tingle, had they put me there, like they have not tingled for many a day."

"Who do you suppose took the note?" inquired Hamish of Roland Yorke, speaking for the first time.

"Bother the note!" was the rejoinder of Mr. Roland.

"It's nothing to us who took it. Arthur didn't. Go and ask the post-office."

"But the seal?" Hamish was beginning in a friendly tone of argument. Roland bore him down.

"Who cares for the seal? I don't. If Galloway had stuck himself upon the letter instead of his seal, and never got off it till it reached the cousin Galloway's hand, I'd not care for it. It tells nothing. Do you *want* to find your brother guilty?" he continued in a tone of scorn. "You did not stand up half for him, Hamish Channing, as I'd expect a brother to stand up for me.—Now, then, you people! Are you thinking we are live kangaroos escaped from a menagerie? Be off about your own business! Don't come after us."

The last was addressed to a crowd, who had followed upon their heels from the court, in staring curiosity, with that innate delicacy for which we English are remarkable. They had seen Arthur Channing a thousand times before, every one of them; but as he had been arrested, they must look at him again. Yorke's scornful reproach and his fierce face somewhat scattered them.

"If it had been Galloway's doings I'd never have put my foot inside his confounded old office again!" went on Roland. "No; and my lady might have tried her best to force me. Lugging a fellow up for a pitiful, paltry sum of twenty pounds, who is as much a gentleman as himself—who, as his own senses might tell him, wouldn't touch it with the end of his finger! But it was that Butterby's handiwork, not Galloway's."

"Galloway must have given Butterby his instructions," observed Hamish.

"He didn't, then," snapped Roland. "Jenkins says he knows he did not by the remarks Galloway made to him this morning. And Galloway has been away ever since eleven o'clock—we can't tell where. It is nobody but that evil, mischief-making Butterby, and I'd give a crown out of my pocket to have a good duck at him in the river!"

With regard to Mr. Galloway's knowing nothing of the active proceedings taken against Arthur, Roland was right. Mr. Butterby had dispatched a note to Mr. Galloway's office at one o'clock, stating what he had done, and requesting him to be at the office at two for the examination; which note had been lying there ever since.

It was being opened now—now, at the exact moment that Mr. Roland Yorke was giving vent to that friendly little wish conjoining the river and Mr. Butterby. Mr. Galloway had met a friend in the town, and had gone with him a few miles by rail into the country on unexpected business. He had just returned to find the note, and to hear Jenkins's account of Arthur's arrest.

"I am vexed at this," he exclaimed, his tone betraying excessive annoyance. "Butterby has exceeded his orders."

Jenkins thought he might venture to put in a word for Arthur. He had been intensely surprised, indeed grieved, at the whole affair, and the not less so that he feared what he had unconsciously repeated about a twenty-pound note paying Arthur's debts might have helped it on.

"I feel as sure as sure can be, sir, that it was not Mr. Arthur Channing," he deferentially said. "I have not been in this office with him for more than twelve months without learning something of his principles."

"The principles of all the Channings are well known," returned Mr. Galloway. "No; whatever may be the apparent proofs, I cannot bring myself to think it could be Arthur Channing. Although——" Mr. Galloway did not say although *what*, but changed the topic abruptly. "Are they in court now?"

"I expect so, sir. Mr. Yorke is not back yet."

Mr. Galloway walked to the outer door, deliberating what his course should be. The affair grieved him more than he could express; it angered him, chiefly for his old friend Mr. Channing's sake. "I had better go up to the Guildhall," he soliloquized, "and see if——"

There they were, turning the corner of the street—Roland Yorke, Hamish, and Arthur, and the tail of followers behind. Mr. Galloway waited till they came up. Hamish did not enter or stop, but went straight home. "They will be so anxious for news," he exclaimed. Not a word had been exchanged between the brothers. "No wonder that he shuns coming in!" thought Arthur.

Roland Yorke threw his hat from him in silence, and sat down in his place at the desk. Mr. Galloway touched Arthur with his finger and motioned him towards the private room, and stood there facing him, speaking gravely,—

"Tell me the truth as before God. Are you innocent or guilty? What you say shall not be used against you."

Quick as lightning, in all solemn earnestness, the word "innocent" was on Arthur's lips. It had been better for him, perhaps, that he had spoken it. But, alas! that uncertain perplexity as to how far he might venture to assert his own exculpation was upon him still. What impression could this hesitation, coupled with the known suspicious circumstances, make upon the mind of Mr. Galloway?

"Have you *no* answer?" emphatically asked Mr. Galloway.

"I am not guilty, sir."

Meanwhile, what do you suppose were the sensations of Mr. Channing? We all know that anguish of mind is far more painful to bear when the body is quiescent than when it is in motion. In any great trouble, any terrible suspense, look at our sleepless nights! We lie, and toss, and turn, and say, When will the night be gone? In the day we can partially shake it off, walking here, walking there; the brunt of the anguish is lost in the body's exertion.

Mr. Channing could not take this exertion. Lying there always, his days were little better to him than nights, and this strange blow, which had fallen so suddenly and unexpectedly, did nearly overwhelm him. Until that afternoon he would have confidently said that his son might have been trusted in a room full of untold gold. He would have said it still but for Arthur's manner; it was that which staggered him. More than one urgent message had been dispatched for Mr. Galloway, but that gentleman was unable to go to him until late in the evening.

"My friend," said Mr. Galloway, bending over the sofa when they were left alone, "I am more grieved at this than you can be."

Mr. Channing clasped his hand. "Tell me what you think yourself—the simple truth, unglossed over; I ask it, Galloway, by our long friendship. Do you deem him innocent or guilty?"

There might be no subterfuge in the answer to words so earnest, and Mr. Galloway did not attempt any. He bent lower and spoke in a whispered tone. "I believe him to be guilty."

Mr. Channing closed his eyes, and his lips momentarily moved. A word of prayer, to be helped *to bear*, was going up to the throne of God.

"But never think that it was I who instituted these proceedings against him," resumed Mr. Galloway. "When I called in Butterby to my aid this morning, I had no more notion that it was Arthur Channing who was guilty than I have that it was that—that sofa of yours. Butterby would have cast suspicion to him then, but I repelled it. He afterwards acted upon his own responsibility while my back was turned. It is as I say often to my office people—I can't stir out for a few hours but something goes wrong! You know the details of the loss?"

"Ay, by heart," replied Mr. Channing. "They are suspicious against Arthur only in so far as that he was alone with the letter. Sufficient time must have been taken, as I conclude, to wet the envelope and unfasten the gum; and it would appear that he alone had that time. This apparent suspicion would have been nothing to my mind, knowing Arthur as I do, had it not been coupled to a suspicious manner."

"There it is," assented Mr. Galloway warmly. "It is that manner which leaves no room for doubt. I had him with me privately when the examination was over, and begged him to tell me, as before God—innocent or guilty. He could not. He stood like a statue, with a confused face, his eyes down, and his colour varying. He is badly constituted for the commission of crime, for he cannot brave it out. One, knowing himself wrongfully accused, would lay his hand upon his heart, with a bright, upright countenance, and say, I am innocent of this, so help me Heaven! I must confess I did not like his manner yesterday when he heard me say I should place it in the hands of the police," continued Mr. Galloway. "He grew suddenly agitated, and begged I would not."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Channing, with a groan of pain he could not wholly suppress. "It is an incredible mystery. What could he want with the money? The tale told about his having debts has no foundation; he has positively none."

Mr. Galloway shook his head; he would not speak out his thoughts. He knew that Hamish was in debt; he knew that Master Roland Yorke indulged in expensive habits whenever he got the opportunity; and he now deemed it likely that Arthur, between the two examples, might have been drawn in. "I shall not allow my doubts of him to go further than you," he said aloud; "and I shall put a summary stop to the law proceedings."

"How will you do that, now that they are publicly entered upon?" asked Mr. Channing.

"I'll manage it," was the reply. "We'll see which is strongest—I or Butterby."

When they were gathering together for the reading that night, Arthur took his place as usual. Mr. Channing looked at him sternly and spoke sternly, in the presence of them all. "Will your conscience allow you to join in this?"

How it stung him! Knowing himself innocent, seeing Hamish, the real culprit, basking there in their love and respect as usual, the unmerited obloquy cast upon him was nearly too painful to bear. He did not answer: he was battling down his rebellious spirit; and the gentle voice of Mrs. Channing rose instead.

"James, there is all the more need for him to join in it if things be as you fear." And Mr. Channing applied himself to the reading.

"My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation. Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure and make not haste in time of trouble."

It was a portion of Scripture but rarely chosen, and perhaps for that reason it fell upon Arthur with greater force. As he listened on, the words brought with them a healing balm; and his chafed, sore spirit was soothed, and grew trusting and peaceful as that of a little child.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MORNING CALL.

You may possibly be blaming Arthur Channing for meeting this trouble in so sad a spirit. Were such an accusation cast unjustly upon you, you would throw it impatiently off, and stand up for yourself and your innocence in the broad light of day. Even were you debarred, as he was, from speaking out the whole truth, you would never be cast down to that desponding depth, and thereby give a colouring to the doubt cast upon you. Are you thinking this? But you must remember that it was not for *himself* that Arthur was so weighed down. Had he possessed no conception how the note went, he would have met the charge very differently, bearing himself bravely, and flinging their suspicion to the winds. "You people cannot think *me* guilty," he might have said; "my whole previous life is a refutation to the charge." He would have held up his head and heart cheerfully and hopefully, waiting and looking for the time when elucidation should come.

No; his grief, his despondency were felt for Hamish. *There* was the fester of the wound. If Arthur Channing had cherished faith in one living being more than in another, it was in his elder brother. He loved him with a lasting love, he revered him as few revere a brother, and the shock was great. He would far rather have fallen down to guilt himself than that Hamish should have fallen. Tom Channing had said, with reference to Arthur, that if he were guilty, he should never believe in anything again: they might tell him that the cathedral was a house and not a cathedral, and he should not be surprised. This sort of feeling had come over Arthur. It had disturbed his faith in honour and goodness—it had almost disgusted him with the world. Arthur Channing is not the only one who has found his faith in his fellow-men rudely shaken.

And yet, the first shock over, his mind was busy finding excuses for him. He knew that Hamish had not erred from any base prompting of self-gratification, but from love. You may be inclined to think this a contradiction, for all such promptings to crime must be base. Of course they are; but as the motives differ, so do the degrees of baseness. As sure as though the whole intricacies of the matter had been laid before him, felt Arthur, had Hamish been driven to it in his desperate need, to save his father's place and the family's means of support! He felt that had Hamish alone been in question, he would not have appropriated a pin that was not his to save himself from arrest. What he had done he had done in love. Arthur gave him credit for another thing—that he had never cast a glance to the possibility of suspicion falling on Arthur; the post-office would obtain the credit for the loss—nothing more tangible than that wide field, where they might hunt for the supposed thief until they were tired.

It was a miserable evening that followed the exposure, the precursor of many and many miserable evenings in days to come. Mr. and Mrs. Channing, Hamish, Constance, and Arthur sat in the usual sitting-room when the rest had retired—sat in ominous silence; even Hamish, with his naturally sunny face and his sunny temper, looked gloomy as the grave. Was he deliberating upon whether he should show that all principles of manly justice were not quite dead within him by speaking up at last, and clearing his wrongfully-accused brother? But then, his father's place, his mother's home—all might be forfeited. Who can tell whether this was the purport of Hamish's thoughts as he sat there in abstraction, away from the light, his head upon his hand? *He* did not say.

Arthur rose; the silence was telling upon him. "May I say good-night to you, father?"

"Have you nothing else to say?" asked Mr. Channing.

"In what way, sir?" asked Arthur in a low tone.

"In the way of explanation. Will you leave me to go to my restless pillow without it? This is the first estrangement which has come between us."

What explanation *could* he give? But to leave his father suffering in body and in mind, without attempt at it, was a hard pain to bear.

"Father, I am innocent," he said. It was all he could say, and it was spoken all too quietly.

Mr. Channing gazed at him searchingly. "In the teeth of appearances?"

"Yes, sir, in the teeth of appearances."

"Then why—if I am to believe you—have assumed the aspect of guilt, which you certainly have done?"

Arthur involuntarily glanced to Hamish—the thought in his heart was, "*You* know why, if no one else does"—and caught Hamish looking at him stealthily, under cover of his fingers. Apparently Hamish was annoyed at being so caught, and started up.

"Good-night, mother. I am going to bed."

They wished him good-night, and he left the room. Mr. Channing turned again to Arthur. He took his hand, and spoke with agitation. "My boy, do you know that I would almost rather have died than live to see this guilt fall upon you?"

"O father, don't judge me harshly!" he implored. "Indeed I am innocent."

Mr. Channing paused. "Arthur, you never, as I believe, told me a lie in your life. What is this puzzle?"

"I am not telling a lie now."

"I am tempted to believe you. But why, then, act as if you were guilty? When those men came here to-day, you knew what they wanted; you resigned yourself to them, voluntarily, a prisoner. When Mr. Galloway questioned you privately of your innocence, you could not assert it."

Neither could he now in a more explanatory way than he was doing.

"Can you look in my face and tell me, in all honour, that you know nothing of the loss of the note?"

"All I can say, sir, is that I did not take it or touch it."

"Nay, but you are equivocating!" exclaimed Mr. Channing.

Arthur felt that he was in some measure, and did not gainsay it.

"Are you aware that to-morrow you may be committed for trial on the charge?"

"I know it," replied Arthur. "Unless—unless——" He stopped in agitation. "Unless you will interest yourself with Galloway, and induce him to withdraw the proceedings. Your friendship with him has been close and long, sir, and I think he would do it for you."

"Would you ask this if you were innocent?" said Mr. Channing. "Arthur, it is not the public punishment you ought to dread, but the consciousness of meriting it."

"And that I am not conscious of," he answered emphatically in his bitterness. "Father, I would lay down my life to shield you from care! Think of me as favourably as you can."

"You will not make me your full confidant?"

"I wish I could! I *wish* I could!"

He wrung his father's hand and turned to his mother, halting before her. Would she give him her good-night kiss?

Would she? Did a fond mother ever turn against her child? To the prison, to the scaffold, down to the very depths of obloquy and scorn, a loving mother clings to her son. All else may forsake, but she never, be he what he will. Mrs. Channing drew his face to hers, and burst into sobs as she sheltered it on her bosom.

"*You* will have faith in me, my darling mother!"

The words were spoken in the softest whisper. He kissed her tenderly and hastened from the room, not trusting himself to say good-night to Constance. In the hall he was waylaid by Judith.

"I say, Master Arthur, it isn't true?"

"Of course it is not true, Judith. Don't you know me better?"

"What an old oaf I am for asking, to be sure! Didn't I nurse him, and haven't I watched him grow up, and don't I know my own boys better?" she added to herself, but speaking aloud.

"To be sure you have, Judy."

"But, Master Arthur, why is the master casting blame to you? And when them insolent police came strutting here to-day, as large as life, in their ugly blue coats and shiny hats, why didn't you hold the door wide and show 'em out again? I'd never have demeaned myself to go with 'em politely."

"They wanted me at the town hall, you know, Judith. I suppose you have heard it all?"

"Then want should have been their master for me," retorted Judith. "I'd never have gone unless they had got a cord and drawed me. I shouldn't wonder but they fingered the money themselves!"

Arthur made his escape and went up to his room. He was scarcely within it when Hamish left his chamber and came in. Arthur's heart beat quicker. Was he coming to make a clean breast of it? Not he!

"Arthur," Hamish began, speaking in a kindly but an estranged tone—or else Arthur fancied it—"can I serve you in any way in this business?"

"Of course you cannot," replied Arthur; and he felt vexed with himself that his tone should savour of peevishness.

"I am sorry for it, as you may readily believe, old fellow," resumed Hamish. "When I got into the court to-day, you might have knocked me down with a feather."

"Ay, I should suppose so," said Arthur. "You did not expect the charge would be brought upon me."

"I neither expected it nor believed it when I was told. I inquired of Parkes the beadle what unusual thing was going on, seeing so many people about the doors, and he answered that you were under examination. I laughed at him, thinking he was joking."

Arthur made no reply.

"What can I do for you?" repeated Hamish.

"You can leave me to myself, Hamish. That's about the kindest thing you can do for me to-night."

Hamish did not take the hint immediately. "We must have the accusation quashed at all hazards," he went on. "But my father thinks Galloway will withdraw it. Yorke says he'll not leave a stone unturned to make Heistonleigh believe the money was lost in the post-office."

"Yorke believes so himself," reproachfully rejoined Arthur.

"I think most people do, with the exception of Butterby. Confounded old meddler! There would have been no outcry at all, but for him."

A pause. Arthur did not seem inclined to break it. Hamish had caught up a bit of whalebone, which happened to be lying on the drawers, and was twisting it about in his fingers, glancing at Arthur from time to time. Arthur leaned against the chimney-piece, his hands in his pockets, and in like manner glanced at him. Not the slightest doubt in the world that each was wishing to speak out more freely. But some inward feeling restrained them. Hamish broke the silence.

"Then you have nothing to say to me, Arthur?"

"Not to-night."

Arthur thought the "saying" should have been on the other side. He had cherished some faint hope that Hamish would at least *acknowledge* the trouble he had brought upon him—"I could not help it, Arthur; I was driven to my wits' end; but I never thought of the reproach falling upon you," or words to that effect. No, nothing of the sort.

Constance was ascending the stairs as Hamish withdrew. "Can I come in, Arthur?" she asked.

For answer he opened the door and drew her inside. "Has Hamish spoken of it?" she whispered.

"Not a word—as to his own share in it. He asked, in a general way, if he could serve me. Constance," he feverishly added, "they do not suspect downstairs, do they?"

"Suspect what?"

"That it was Hamish."

"Of course they do not. They suspect you—at least, papa does. He cannot make it out; he never was so puzzled in all his life. He says you must either have taken the money, or connived at its being taken; to believe otherwise would render your manner perfectly inexplicable. O Arthur, he is so grieving! He says other troubles have arisen without fault on our part; but this, the greatest, has been brought by guilt."

"There is no help for it," wailed Arthur. "I could only clear myself at the expense of Hamish, and it would be worse for them to grieve for him than for me. Bright, sunny Hamish, whom my mother has, I believe, in her heart loved the best of all of us! Thank you, Constance, for keeping my counsel."

"How unselfish you are, Arthur!"

"Unselfish! I don't see it as a merit. It is my simple duty to be so in this. If I, by a rash word of complaint, directed suspicion to Hamish, and our home in consequence got broken up, who would be the selfish one then?"

"There's the consideration which frightens and fetters us. Papa must have been thinking of that when he thanked God that the trouble had not fallen upon Hamish."

"Did he do that?" asked Arthur eagerly.

"Yes, just now. 'Thank God that this cloud did not fall upon Hamish!' he exclaimed. 'It had been far worse for us then.'"

Arthur listened. Had he wanted anything to confirm him in the sacrifice he was making, those words of his father's would have done it. Mr. Channing had no greater regard for one son than for the other, but he knew as well as his children how much depended upon Hamish.

The tears were welling up into the eyes of Constance. "I wish I could speak comfort to you!" she whispered.

"Comfort will come with time, I dare say, darling. Don't stay. I seem quite fagged out to-night, and would be alone."

Ay, alone—alone with his grief and with God.

To bed at last, but not to sleep—not for hours and for hours. His anxiety of mind was intense, chiefly for Hamish, though he endured some on his own score. To be pointed at as a thief in the town stung him to the quick, even in anticipation. And there was also the uncertainty as to the morrow's proceedings; for all he knew, they might end in the prosecution being carried on and his committal for trial. Towards morning he dropped into a heavy sleep; and to awake from that was the worst of all, for his troubles came pressing upon his brain with tenfold poignancy.

He rose and dressed in some perplexity—perplexity as to the immediate present. Ought he, or ought he not, to go as usual to Mr. Galloway's? He really could not tell. If Mr. Galloway believed him guilty—and there was little doubt of that now—of course he could no longer be tolerated in the office. On the other hand, to stop away voluntarily might look like an admission of guilt.

He determined to go, and did so. It was the early morning hour, when he had the office to himself. He got through his work—the copying of a somewhat elaborate will—and returned home to breakfast. He found Mr. Channing had risen, which was not usual. Like Arthur, his night had been an anxious one, and the bustle of the breakfast-room was more tolerable than bed. I wonder what Hamish's had been! The meal passed in uncomfortable silence.

A tremendous peal at the hall bell, startling the house, echoing through the Boundaries, astonishing the rooks, and sending them on the wing with a caw! caw! On state occasions it pleased Judith to answer the door herself; her helpmate, over whom she held undisputed sway, ruling her with a tight hand, dared not put herself forward to attempt it. The bell tingled still, and Judith, believing it could be nobody less than the bishop come to alarm them with a matinal visit, hurried on a clean white apron and stepped across the hall.

Mr. Roland Yorke! Nobody more formidable. He passed Judith with an unceremonious nod, and marched into the breakfast-room.

"Good-morning all!—I say, old chap, are you ready to come to the office?—It's good to see you down at this early hour, Mr. Channing."

He was invited to take a seat, but declined; it was time they were at Galloway's, he said. Arthur hesitated.

"I do not know whether Mr. Galloway will expect me," he observed.

"Not expect you!" flashed Roland, lapsing into his loud, excited manner. "I can tell you what, Arthur: if he doesn't expect you, he shan't expect me.—Mr. Channing, did you ever know anything so shamefully overbearing and unjust as that affair yesterday?"

"Unjust, if it be unfounded," replied Mr. Channing.

"Unfounded!" uttered Roland. "If that's not unfounded, there never was an unfounded charge brought yet. I'd answer for Arthur with my own life. I should like to sew up that Butterby! I hope, sir, you'll bring an action against him."

"You feel it strongly, Mr. Roland!"

"I should hope I do! Look you, Mr. Channing, it is a slur on our office—on me, and on Jenkins, and on Galloway himself. Yes, on Galloway. I say what I mean, and nobody shall talk me down. I'd rather believe it was Galloway did it than Arthur. I shall tell him so."

"This sympathy evinces very kind feeling on your part, Ro——"

"I declare I shall go mad if I hear that told me again!" interrupted Roland, turning red with passion. "It makes me wild. Everybody's on with it. 'You—are—very—kind—to—take—up—Arthur Channing's—cause!' they mince out. Incorrigible idiots! Kind! Why, Mr. Channing, if that cat of yours there, basking out her long tail in the sun, were to be accused of swallowing down a mutton chop, and you felt morally certain that she did not do it, wouldn't you stand up for her against punishment?"

Mr. Channing could not forbear a smile at Roland and his hot championship. "To be 'morally certain' may do when cats are in question, Mr. Roland; but the law, unfortunately, requires something more for us, the superior animal. No father living has had more cause to put faith in his children than I. The unfortunate point in this business is, that the loss appears to have occurred so mysteriously, when the letter was in charge of Arthur."

"Yes, if it had occurred that way. But who believes it did, save a few pates with shallow brains?" retorted Roland. "The note is burning a hole in the pocket of some poor, ill-paid wight of a letter-carrier; that's where the note is. I beg your pardon, Mr. Channing, but it's of no use to interrupt me with arguments about old Galloway's seal. They go in at one ear and out at the other. What more easy than to put a penknife under the seal and unfasten it?"

"You cannot do this where gum is used as well; as it was to that letter."

"Who cares for the gum!" retorted Mr. Roland. "I don't pretend to say, sir, how it was accomplished, but I know it must have been done somehow. Watch a conjurer at his tricks! You can't *tell* how he gets a shilling out of a box which you yourself put in—all you know is, he does get it out; or how he exhibits some receptacle, crammed full, which you could have sworn was empty. Just so with the letter. The bank-note did get out of it, but we can't tell how, except that it was not through Arthur. Come along, old fellow, or Galloway may be blowing us up for arriving late."

Twitching Tom's hair as he passed him, treading on the cat's tail, and tossing a branch of sweet-brier full of thorns at Annabel, Mr. Roland Yorke made his way out in a commotion. Arthur, yielding to the strong will, followed.

Roland passed his arm within his, and they went towards Close Street.

"I say, old chum, I haven't had a wink of sleep all night, worrying over this bother. My room is over Lady Augusta's, and she sent up this morning to know what I was pacing about for, like a troubled ghost. I woke at four o'clock, and I could not get to sleep after; so I just stamped about a bit to stamp the time away."

In a happier mood Arthur might have laughed at his Irish speech. "I am glad you stand by me, at any rate, Yorke. I never did it, you know. Here comes Williams. I wonder in what light he will take up the affair? Perhaps he will turn me from my place in the college."

"He had better!" flashed Roland. "I'd 'turn' him!"

Mr. Williams appeared to "take up the affair" in a resentful, haughty sort of spirit, something like Roland, only that he was quieter over it. He cast ridicule to the charge. "I am astonished at Galloway!" he observed, when he had been speaking with them some moments. "Should he go on with the case, the town will cry shame upon him."

"Ah, but you see it was that meddling Butterby, not Galloway," returned Yorke. "As if Galloway did not know us chaps in his office better than to suspect us!"

"I fancy Butterby is more fond of meddling than he need be," said the organist. "A party in the town, living not a hundred miles from this very spot, was suspected of having made free with a ring, which disappeared from a dressing-table, where she was paying an evening visit; and I declare if Butterby did not put his nose into it, and worm out all the particulars!"

"That she had not taken it?"

"That she had. But it was productive of great annoyance; all parties, even those who lost the ring, would rather have buried it in quiet. It was hushed up afterwards. Butterby ought to understand people's wishes before he sets to work."

"I wish pressgangs were in fashion!" emphatically uttered Roland. "What a nice prize he'd make!"

"I suppose I can depend upon you to take the duty at college this morning?" Mr. Williams said to Arthur as he was leaving them.

"Yes; I shall be out in time for the examination at the Guildhall. The hour fixed is half-past eleven."

"Old villains the magistrates must have been to remand it at all!" was the concluding comment of Mr. Roland Yorke.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHECKMATED.

CONSTANCE CHANNING proceeded to her duties as usual at Lady Augusta Yorke's. She drew her veil over her face only to traverse the very short way that conveyed her thither, for the sense of shame was strong upon her conscience; not shame for Arthur, but for Hamish. It had half broken Constance's heart.

There are times in our every-day lives when all things seem to wear a depressing aspect, turn to which side we will. They were wearing it that day to Constance. Apart from home troubles, she felt particularly discouraged in the educational task she had undertaken. You heard the promise made to her by Caroline Yorke to be up and ready for her every morning at seven. Caroline kept it for two mornings, and then failed. This morning and the previous morning Constance had been there at seven, and returned home without getting to see either of the children. Both were ready for her when she entered now.

"How am I to deal with you?" she said to Caroline in a sad but affectionate tone. "I do not wish to *force* you to obey me; I would prefer that you should do it cheerfully."

"It is tiresome to get up early," responded Caroline. "I can't wake when Martha comes."

"Whether Martha goes to you at seven, or at eight, or at nine, she has the same trouble to get you up."

"I don't see any good in getting up early," cried Caroline.

"Do you see any good in acquiring good habits instead of bad ones?" asked Constance.

"But, Miss Channing, why need we learn to get up early? We are ladies. It's only the poor who need get up at unseasonable hours—those who have their living to get."

"Is it only the poor who are accountable to God for waste of time, Caroline?"

Caroline paused. She did not like to give up her argument. "It's so very low-lived to get up with the sun; I don't think real ladies ever do it."

"You think 'real ladies' wait until the sun has been up a few hours and warmed the pavement for them?"

"Y—es," said Caroline. But it was not spoken very readily, for she had a suspicion that Miss Channing was laughing at her.

"May I ask where you have acquired your notions of 'real ladies,' Caroline?"

Caroline pouted. "Don't you call Colonel Joliffe's daughters ladies, Miss Channing?"

"Yes—in position."

"That's where we went yesterday, you know. Mary Joliffe says she never gets up till half-past eight, and that it is not lady-like to get up earlier. Real ladies don't, Miss Channing."

"My dear, shall I relate to you a pretty anecdote that I have heard?"

"Oh yes!" replied Caroline, her listless mood changing to animation; anecdotes, or anything in that desultory way, being far more acceptable to the young lady than lessons.

"Before I begin, will you tell me whether you condescend to admit that our good Queen is a 'real lady'?"

"O Miss Channing, now you are laughing at me! As if any of us in all England could be so great a lady as the Queen."

"Very good. When she was a little girl, a child of her own age, the daughter of one of the nobility, was brought to Kensington Palace to spend the day with her. In talking together, the Princess Victoria mentioned something she had seen when out of doors that morning at seven o'clock. 'At seven o'clock!' exclaimed the young visitor; 'how early that is to be abroad! I never get out of bed until eight. Is there any use in rising so early?' The Duchess of Kent, who was present, took up the answer: 'My daughter may be called to fill the throne of England when she shall be grown up; therefore it is especially necessary that she should learn the full value of time.' You see, Caroline, the princess was not allowed to waste her mornings in bed, although she was destined to be the first lady in the land. We may be thankful to her admirable mother for making her in that, as in many other things, a pattern to us."

"Is it a true anecdote, Miss Channing?"

"It was related to my mother many years ago by a lady who was at that time much at Kensington Palace. I think there is little doubt of its truth. One fact we all know, Caroline, that the Queen retains her early habits, and implants them upon her children. What do you suppose would be her Majesty's surprise were one of her daughters—say, the Princess Helena, or the Princess Louise—to decline rising early for their morning studies with their governess, Miss Hilyard, on the plea that it was not 'lady-like'?"

Caroline's ground of objection appeared to be melting away under her. "But it is a dreadful plague," she grumbled, "to be obliged to get up from one's nice warm bed for the sake of some horrid old lessons!"

"You spoke of 'the poor'—those who 'have their living to get'—as the only class who need rise betimes," resumed Constance. "Put that notion away from you at once and for ever, Caroline; there cannot be a more false one. The higher we go in the scale of life, the more onerous become our duties in this world, and the greater is our responsibility to God. He to whom five talents were entrusted did not make them other five by wasting his days in idleness. O Caroline!—Fanny, dear, come you closer and listen to me—your time and opportunities for good must be *used*, not abused or wasted."

"I *will* try and get up," said Caroline repentantly. "I wish mamma had trained me to it when I was a child, as the Duchess of Kent trained the princess! I might have learned to like it by this time."

"Long before this," said Constance. "Do you remember the good old saying, 'Do what you ought, that you may do what you like'? Habit is second nature. Were I told that I might lie in bed every morning till nine or ten o'clock as a great favour, I should consider it a great punishment."

"But I have not been trained to get up, Miss Channing; and it is nothing short of punishment to me to do so."

"The punishment of self-denial we all have to bear, Caroline. But I can tell you what will take off half its sting."

"What?" asked Caroline eagerly.

Constance bent towards her. "Jesus Christ said, 'If any will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' When once we learn HOW to take it up cheerfully, bravely, for His sake, looking to Him to be helped, the sting is gone. 'No cross, no crown,' you know, my children."

"No cross, no crown!" Constance had enough of cross to carry just then. In the course of the morning Lady Augusta came into the room boisterously, her manner indicative of great surprise.

"Miss Channing, what *is* this tale about your brother's having been arrested for stealing that missing bank-note? Some visitors have just called in upon me, and they say the town is ringing with the news."

It was one of the first of Constance Channing's bitter pills; they were to be her portion for many a day. Her heart fluttered, her cheek varied, and her answer to Lady Augusta Yorke was low and timid.

"It is true that he was arrested yesterday on suspicion."

"What a shocking thing! Is he in prison?"

"Oh no."

"Did he take the note?"

The question pained Constance worse than all. "He did not take it," she replied in a clear, soft tone. "To those who know Arthur well, it would be impossible to think he did."

"But he was before the magistrates yesterday, I hear, and is going up again to-day."

"Yes, that is so."

"And Roland could not open his lips to tell me of this when I came home last night!" grumbled the lady. "We were late, and he was the only one up; Gerald and Tod were in bed. I shall ask him why he did not. But, Miss Channing, this must be a dreadful blow for you all."

"It would be a worse, Lady Augusta, if we believed him guilty," she replied from her aching heart.

"Oh dear! I hope he is not guilty!" continued the lady, displaying as little delicacy of feeling as she could well do. "It would be quite a dangerous thing, you know, for my Roland to be in the same office."

"Be at ease, Lady Augusta," returned Constance, with a tinge of irony she could not wholly suppress. "Your son will incur no harm from the companionship of Arthur."

"What does Hamish say? handsome Hamish! He does not deserve that such a blow should come near him."

Constance felt her colour deepen. She bent her face, by way of hiding it, over the exercise she was correcting.

"Is he likely to be cleared of the charge?" perseveringly resumed Lady Augusta.

"Not by actual proof, I fear," answered Constance, pressing her hand upon her brow as she remembered that he could only be proved innocent by another's being proved guilty. "The note seems to have been lost in so very mysterious a manner that positive proof of his exoneration will be difficult."

"Well, it is a dreadful thing!" concluded Lady Augusta.

Meanwhile, at the very moment her ladyship was speaking, the magistrates were in the town hall in full conclave—the case before them. The news had spread—had excited interest far and wide; the bench was crowded, and the court was one dense mass of heads.

Arthur appeared, escorted by his brother Hamish and by Roland Yorke. Roland was in high feather, throwing his haughty glances everywhere; for he had an inkling of what was to be the termination of the affair, and did not conceal his triumph. Mr. Galloway also was of their party.

Mr. Galloway was the first witness put forth by Mr. Butterby. The latter gentleman was in high feather also, like Roland, believing he saw his way clear to a triumphant conviction. Mr. Galloway was questioned; and for some minutes it all went on swimmingly.

"On the afternoon of the loss, before you closed your letter, who was in your office?"

"My clerks—Roland Yorke and Arthur Channing."

"They saw the letter, I believe?"

"They did."

"And the bank-note?"

"Most probably."

"It was the prisoner, Arthur Channing, who fetched the bank-note from your private room to the other one? Did he see you put it into the letter?"

"I cannot say."

A halt. "But he was in full possession of his eyes just then."

"No doubt he was."

"Then what should hinder his seeing you put the note into the letter?"

"I will not swear that I put the note into the letter."

The magistrates pricked up their ears. Mr. Butterby pricked up his, and looked at the witness.

"What do you say?"

"I will not swear that I put the bank-note inside the letter," deliberately repeated Mr. Galloway.

"Not swear that you put the bank-note into the letter? What is that you mean?"

"The meaning is plain enough," replied Mr. Galloway calmly. "Must I repeat it for the third time? I will not swear that I put the note into the letter."

"But your instructions to me were that you did put the note into the letter," cried Mr. Butterby, interrupting the examination.

"I will not swear it," reiterated the witness.

"Then there's an end of the case!" exclaimed the magistrates' clerk in some choler. "What on earth was the time of the bench taken up for in bringing it here?"

And there *was* an end of the case—at any rate, for the present—for nothing more satisfactory could be got out of Mr. Galloway.

"I have been checkmated," ejaculated the angry Butterby.

They walked back arm-in-arm to Mr. Galloway's, Roland and Arthur. Hamish went the other way to his own office, and Mr. Galloway lingered somewhere behind. Jenkins—true-hearted Jenkins, in the black handkerchief still—was doubly respectful to Arthur, and rose to welcome him, a faint hectic of pleasure illumining his face at the termination of the charge.

"Who said our office was going to be put down for a thief's!" uttered Roland. "Old Galloway's a trump! Here's your place, Arthur."

Arthur did not take it. He had seen from the window the approach of Mr. Galloway, and delicacy prevented his assuming his old post until bade to do so. Mr. Galloway came in, and motioned him into his own room.

"Arthur Channing," he said, "I have acted leniently in this unpleasant matter for your father's sake; but from my very heart I believe you to be guilty."

"I thank you, sir," Arthur said, "for that and all other kindness. I am not as guilty as you deem me. Do you wish me to leave?"

"If you can give me no better assurance of your innocence—if you can give me no explanation of the peculiar and most unsatisfactory manner in which you have met the charge—yes. To retain you here would be unjust to my own interests, and unfair as regards Jenkins and Roland Yorke."

To give this explanation was impossible; neither dared Arthur assert more emphatically his innocence. Once convince Mr. Galloway that he was not the guilty party, and that gentleman would forthwith issue fresh instructions to Butterby for the further investigation of the affair: of this Arthur felt convinced. He could only be silent and remain under the stigma.

"Then—I had better—you would wish me, perhaps—to go at once," hesitated Arthur.

"Yes," shortly replied Mr. Galloway.

He spoke a word of farewell, which Mr. Galloway replied to by a nod, and went into the front office. There he began to collect together certain trifles that belonged to him.

"What's that for?" asked Roland Yorke.

"I am going," he replied.

"Going!" roared Roland, jumping to his feet, and dashing down his pen full of ink, with little regard to the deed he was copying. "Galloway has never turned you off!"

"Yes, he has."

"Then I'll go too!" thundered Roland, who, truth to say, had flown into an uncontrollable passion, startling Jenkins and arousing Mr. Galloway. "I'll not stop in a place where that sort of injustice goes on! He'll be turning me out next! Catch me stopping for it!"

"Are you taken crazy, Mr. Roland Yorke?"

The question proceeded from his master, who came forth to make it. Roland turned to him, his temper unsubdued, and his colour rising.

"Channing never took the money, sir. It is not just to turn him away."

"Did you help him to take it, pray, that you identify yourself with the affair so persistently and violently?" demanded Mr. Galloway in a cynical tone. And Roland answered with a hot and haughty word.

"If you cannot attend to your business a little better, you will get your dismissal from me; you won't require to dismiss yourself," said Mr. Galloway. "Sit down, sir, and go on with your work."

"And that's all the thanks a fellow gets for taking up a cause of oppression!" muttered Mr. Roland Yorke as he sullenly resumed his place at the desk. "This is a precious world to live in!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PIECE OF PREFERMENT.

BEFORE the nine days' wonder, which, you know, is said to be the accompaniment of all marvels, had died away, Helstonleigh was fated to be astonished by another piece of news of a different nature—the preferment of the Reverend William Yorke.

A different preferment from what had been anticipated for him; otherwise, the news had been nothing extraordinary, for it is customary for the dean and chapter to provide livings for their minor canons. In a fine open part of the town was a cluster of buildings, called Hazeldon's Charity, so named from its founder, Sir Thomas Hazeldon—a large paved enclosure, fenced in by iron railings and a pair of iron gates. A chapel stood in the midst. On either side, right and left, ran sixteen almshouses, and at the top, opposite to the iron gates, stood the dwelling of the chaplain to the charity, a superior residence, called Hazeldon House. This preferment, worth three hundred pounds a year, had been for some weeks vacant, the chaplain having died. It was in the gift of the present baronet, Sir Frederick Hazeldon, a descendant of the founder, and he now suddenly conferred it upon the Reverend William Yorke. It took Helstonleigh by surprise. It took Mr. Yorke himself entirely by surprise. He possessed no interest whatever with Sir Frederick, and had never cast a thought to the probability of its becoming his. Perhaps Sir Frederick's motive for bestowing it upon him was this—that, of all the clergy in the neighbourhood looking out for something good to drop to them, Mr. Yorke had been nearly the only one who had not solicited it of Sir Frederick.

Its coming was none the less welcome. It would not interfere in the least with the duties or preferment of his minor canonry; a minor canon had once before held it. In short, it was one of those slices of luck which do sometimes come unexpectedly in this world.

In the soft light of the summer evening, Constance Channing stood under the cedar tree. A fine old tree was that, making the boast of the Channings' garden. The sun was setting in all its gorgeous beauty, clouds of crimson and purple floated on the horizon, their gold edges dazzling the eye; a roseate hue pervaded the atmosphere, and lighted with its own loveliness the sweet face of Constance. It was an evening that seemed to speak peace to the soul; so would it have spoken to that of Constance but for the ever-present trouble which had fallen there.

Another trouble was falling upon her, or seemed to be; one that more immediately concerned herself. Since the disgrace had come to Arthur, Mr. Yorke had been less frequent in his visits. Some days had now elapsed from the time of Arthur's dismissal from Mr. Galloway's, and Mr. Yorke had called but once. This might have arisen from accidental circumstances, but Constance felt a different fear in her heart.

Hark! that is his ring at the hall bell. Constance has not listened for and loved that ring so long to be mistaken now. Another minute, and she hears those footsteps approaching, warming her life-blood, quickening her pulses; the rosy hue on her face deepens to crimson as she turns it towards him. She knows nothing yet of his appointment to the Hazeldon chaplaincy; Mr. Yorke has not known it himself two hours.

He came up and laid his hands upon her shoulders playfully, looking down at her. "What will you give me for some news by way of greeting, Constance?"

"News?" she answered, raising her eyes to his, and scarcely knowing what she did say, in the confusion of meeting him, in her all-conscious love. "Is it good or bad?"

"Helstonleigh will not call it good, I expect. There are those upon whom it will fall like a thunderclap."

"Tell it me, William; I cannot guess," she said, somewhat wearily. "I suppose it does not concern me."

"But it does concern you—at second hand."

Poor Constance, timorous and full of dread since the grief had fallen, was but too apt to connect everything with that one source. We have done the same in our lives, all of us, when under the consciousness of some secret terror. She appeared to be living upon a mine, which might explode any hour and bring down Hamish in the *débris*. The words bore an ominous sound; and foolish as it may appear to us, who know the nature of Mr. Yorke's news, Constance fell into a sudden panic, and turned white.

"Does—does—it concern Arthur?" she uttered.

"No, Constance," changing his tone, and dropping his hands as he gazed at her, "why should you be so terrified for Arthur? You have been a changed girl since that happened—shrinking, timid, starting at every sound, unable to look people in the face. Why so, if he is innocent?"

She shivered inwardly, as was perceptible to the eyes of Mr. Yorke. "Tell me the news," she answered in a low tone, "if, as you say, it concerns me."

"I hope it will concern you, Constance. At any rate, it concerns me. The news," he gravely added, "is that I am appointed to the Hazeldon chaplaincy."

"O William!" The sudden revulsion of feeling from intense, undefined terror to joyful surprise was too much to bear calmly. Her emotion overpowered her, and she burst into tears. Mr. Yorke compelled her to sit down on the garden bench, and stood over her—his arm on her shoulder, her hand clasped in his.

"Constance, what is the cause of this?" he asked, when her emotion had passed.

She evaded the question. She dried her tears and smoothed her face to smiles, and tried to look as unconscious as she might. "Is it really true that you have the chaplaincy?" she questioned.

"I received my appointment to it this evening. Why Sir Frederick should have conferred it upon me I am unable to say. I feel all the more obliged to him for its being unexpected. Shall you like the house, Constance?"

The rosy hue stole over her cheeks again, and a happy smile parted her lips. "I once said to mamma, when we had been spending the evening there, that I should like to live at Hazeldon House. I like its situation; I like its rooms; I shall like to be busy among all those poor old people. But when I said it, William, I had not the slightest idea that the chance would ever be mine."

"You have only to determine now how soon the 'chance' shall become certainty," he said. "I must take up my residence there within a month, and I do not care how soon my wife takes up hers after that."

The rose grew deeper. She bent her brow down upon her hand and his, hiding her face. "It could not possibly be, William."

"What could not?"

"So soon. Papa and mamma are going to Germany, you know, and I must keep house here. Besides, what would Lady Augusta say at my leaving her situation almost as soon as I have entered upon it ? "

" Lady Augusta——" Mr. Yorke was beginning impulsively, but checked himself. Constance lifted her face and looked at him. His brow was knit, and a stern expression had settled on it.

" What is it, William ? "

" I want to know what caused your grief just now," was his abrupt rejoinder, " and what it is that has made you appear so strange of late."

The words fell on her like an icebolt. For a few brief moments she had forgotten her fears, had revelled in the sunshine of the prospective happiness so suddenly laid out before her. Back came the gloom, the humiliation, the sick terror.

" Had Arthur been guilty of the charge laid to him, and you cognizant of it, I could fancy that your manner would be precisely what it is," answered Mr. Yorke.

Her heart beat wildly. He spoke in a reserved, haughty tone, and she felt a foreboding that some unpleasant explanation was at hand. She felt more—that perhaps she ought not to become his wife with this cloud hanging over them. She nerved herself to say what she deemed she ought to say.

" William," she began, " perhaps you would wish that our marriage should be delayed, until—until—I mean now that this suspicion has fallen upon Arthur ? "

She could scarcely get the incoherent words out, so great was her agitation. Mr. Yorke saw how white and trembling were her lips.

" I cannot believe Arthur guilty," was his reply.

She remembered that Hamish was, though Arthur was not ; and, in point of disgrace, it amounted to the same thing. Constance passed her hand over her perplexed brow. " He is looked upon as guilty by many—that we unfortunately know ; and it may not be thought well that you should, under the circumstance, make me your wife. *You* may not think it so."

Mr. Yorke made no reply. He may have been deliberating upon the question.

" Let us put it in this light, William," she resumed, her tone one of intense pain. " Suppose, for argument's sake, that Arthur were guilty, would you marry me freely all the same ? "

"It is a hard question, Constance," he said, after a pause.

"It must be answered."

"Were Arthur guilty, and you cognizant of it—screening him—I should lose half my confidence in you, Constance."

That was the knell. Her heart and her eyes alike fell, and she knew, in that one moment, that all hope of marrying William Yorke was gone.

"You think that, were he guilty—I am speaking only for argument's sake," she breathed in her emotion—"you think, were I cognizant of it, I ought to betray him—to make it known to the world?"

"I do not say that, Constance. No. But you are my affianced wife; and, whatever cognizance of the matter you might possess, whatever might be the mystery attending it—and a mystery I believe there is—you should repose the confidence and the mystery in me."

"That you might decide whether or not I am worthy to be your wife!" she exclaimed, a flash of indignation lighting up her spirit. To doubt her! She felt it keenly. Oh that she could have told him the truth! But she dared not, for Hamish's sake.

He took her hand in his; he laid the other upon it; he gazed searchingly into her face. "Constance, you know what you are to me. This unhappy business has been as great a trial to me as to you. Can you deny to me all cognizance of its mystery, its guilt? I ask not whether Arthur be innocent or guilty; I ask whether you are innocent of partisanship in the concealment. Can you stand before me and assure me in all truth that you are so?"

She could not. "I believe in Arthur's innocence," she replied in a low tone.

So did Mr. Yorke, or he might not have rejoined as he did. "I believe also in his innocence," he said. "Otherwise——"

"You would not make me your wife. Speak it without hesitation, William."

"Well, I cannot tell what my course would be. Perhaps I would not."

A silence. Constance was feeling the avowal in all its bitter humiliation. It seemed to humiliate *her*. "No, no; it would not be right of him to make me his wife now," she reflected. "Hamish's disgrace may come out any day; he may be brought to trial for it yet. His wife's brother!

and he a cathedral clergyman! No, it would never do. William," she said aloud; "we must part."

"Part?" echoed Mr. Yorke, as the words issued faintly from her trembling lips.

The tears rose to her eyes; it was with difficulty she kept them from falling. "I cannot become your wife while this cloud overhangs Arthur. It would not be right."

"You say you believe in his innocence," was the reply of Mr. Yorke.

"I do. But the world does not. William," she continued, placing her hand in his, while the tears rained freely down her face, "let us say farewell now."

He drew her closer to him; he dried the tears from her face. "Explain this mystery, Constance. Why are you not open with me? What has come between us?"

"I cannot explain," she sobbed. "There is nothing for us but to part."

"We will not part. Why should we, when you say Arthur is innocent, and I believe him to be so? Constance, my darling, what is this grief?"

What were the words but a tacit admission that, if Arthur were not innocent, they should part? Constance so interpreted them. Had any additional weight been needed to strengthen her resolution, this would have supplied it.

"Farewell! farewell, William! To remain with you is but prolonging the pain of parting."

That her resolution to part was fixed, he saw. It was his turn to be angry now. A slight touch of the haughty Yorke temper was in him, and there were times when it peeped out. He folded his arms, and the flush left his countenance.

"I cannot understand you, Constance. I cannot fathom your motive, or why you are doing this, unless it be that you never cared for me."

"I have cared for you as I never cared for any one—as I shall never care for another. To part with you will be like parting with life."

"Then why speak of it? Be my wife, Constance; be my wife!"

"No, it might bring you disgrace," she hysterically answered; "and that you shall never encounter through me. Do not keep me, William; my resolution is irrevocable."

Sobbing as though her heart would break, she turned from him. Mr. Yorke followed her indoors. In the hall stood Mrs. Channing. Constance turned aside, anywhere, to hide her face from her mother's eye. Mrs. Channing did not particularly observe her, and turned to accost Mr. Yorke. An angry frown was on his brow, an angry weight on his spirit. Constance's words and course of action had now fully impressed him with the belief that Arthur was guilty—that she knew him to be so; and the proud Yorke blood within him whispered that it was *well* so to part. But he had loved her with a deep and enduring love, and his heart ached bitterly.

"Will you come in and lend a helping hand in the discussion ?" Mrs. Channing said to him, with a smile. "We are carving out the plan for our journey."

He bowed, and followed her into the sitting-room. He did not speak of what had just occurred, leaving that to Constance, if she should choose to give an explanation. It was not Mr. Yorke's place to say, "Constance has given me up. She has impressed me with the conviction that Arthur is guilty, and she says she will not bring disgrace upon me." No, certainly ; he could not tell them that.

Mr. Channing lay as usual on his sofa, Hamish near him—gay Hamish, who was looking as light-faced as ever ; undoubtedly he seemed as light-hearted. Hamish had a book before him, a map, and a pencil. He was tracing out the route of his father and mother, joking always.

After much anxious consideration, *pro* and *con*, Mr. Channing had determined to proceed at once to Germany. It is true that he could not well afford to do so ; and before he heard from Dr. Lamb the very insignificant cost it would prove, he had been in the habit of putting it out of view, as wholly impracticable at present. But the information given him by the doctor changed his views, and he began to think it not only practicable, but feasible. His children were giving much help now to meet home expenses—Constance, in going to Lady Augusta's ; Arthur, to the cathedral. Dr. Lamb strongly urged his going, and Mr. Channing himself knew that, if he could but come home restored to health and to activity, the journey, instead of being a cost, would, in point of fact, prove a saving. With much deliberation, with much prayer to be helped to a right decision, Mr. Channing at length made it—to go.

It was necessary to start at once, for the season was already advanced; indeed, as Dr. Lamb observed, he ought to have been away a month back. Then all was bustle and preparation. Two or three days were wasted in the unhappy business concerning Arthur. But all the grieving over that, all the staying at home for it, could do no good; Mr. Channing was fain to see that it could not, and the preparations were hastened. Hamish was most active in all—in urging the departure, in helping at the packing, in carrying out their route—joking, I say, always.

"Now mind, mother, as you are to be manager-in-chief, it is the *Antwerp* packet you are to take," he was saying in a serio-comic, dictatorial manner. "Don't you get seduced on to any indiscriminate steamer, or you may find yourselves carried off to some unknown regions inhabited by cannibals, and never be heard of more. The Antwerp steamer, and it starts from St. Katherine's Docks—if you have the pleasure of knowing that enchanting part of London. I made acquaintance with it in a fog, in that sight-seeing visit I paid to town; and its beauty, I must confess, did not impress me. From St. Katherine's Docks you will reach Antwerp in eighteen hours, which is an average passage—always provided the ship's bottom does not come out."

"Hamish!"

"Well, I'll not anticipate; I dare say it is well calked. At any rate, take an insurance ticket against accident, and then you'll be all right. An Irishman slept at the top of a very high hotel. 'Are you not afraid to sleep up there, in case of fire?' a friend asked him. 'By the powers, no,' said he; 'they tell me the house is insured.' Now, mother mine——"

"Shall we have to stay in Antwerp, Hamish?" interrupted Mr. Channing.

"Yes, as you return, sir; which answer you will think emanated from our Irish friend. Nobody ever went to Antwerp yet without giving the glorious old town a few hours' inspection. I only wish the chance were offered me! Now, as you go, you will not be able to get about; but as you return you will—if all the good has been done you that I anticipate."

"Do not be too sanguine, Hamish."

"My dear father," and Hamish's tone assumed a deeper feeling, "to be sanguine was implanted in my nature at my birth; but in this case I am more than sanguine. You will be cured, depend upon it. When you return in three months' time I shall not have a fly waiting for you at the station here, or, if I do, it will be for the mother's exclusive use and benefit; I shall parade you through the town on my arm, showing your renewed strength of leg and limb to the delighted eyes of Helstonleigh."

"Why are you so silent?" Mrs. Channing inquired of William Yorke. She had suddenly noticed that he had scarcely said a word, that he had sat in a fit of abstraction since his entrance.

"Silent? Oh! Hamish is talking for all of us," he answered, starting from his reverie.

"The ingratitude that people possess!" ejaculated Hamish. "Is he saying that in a spirit of complaint now? —Mr. Yorke, I am astonished at you."

At this moment Tom was heard to enter the house. That it could be nobody but Tom was undoubted, by the noise and commotion; the others were quieter, except Annabel, and she was a girl. Tom it was, and he came in, tongue and hands and feet all going together.

"What luck, is it not, Mr. Yorke? I am so glad it's you who has got it!"

Mr. Channing looked up with surprise. "Tom, you will never learn good manners! Got what?"

"Has he not told you?" exclaimed Tom, entirely ignoring the reproof as to his manners. "He is appointed to Hazeldon Chapel. Where's Constance? I'll be bound he has told *her!*"

Saucy Tom! They received his news in silence, looking to Mr. Yorke for explanation. He rose from his chair, and his cheek slightly flushed as he confirmed the tidings.

"Does Constance know it?" inquired Mrs. Channing, speaking in the moment's impulse.

"Yes," was Mr. Yorke's short answer. And then he said something not very coherent about having an engagement, and took his leave, wishing Mr. Channing every benefit from his journey.

"But we do not go until the day after to-morrow," objected Mr. Channing. "We shall see you before that."

Another unsatisfactory sentence from Mr. Yorke, that he "was not sure." In shaking hands with Mrs. Channing he bent down with a whisper: "I think Constance has something to say to you."

Mrs. Channing found her in her room in a sad state of distress. "Child, what is this?" she uttered.

"O mother, mother, it is all at an end, and we have parted for ever!" was poor Constance's wailed-out answer. And Mrs. Channing, feeling quite sick with the various troubles that seemed to be coming upon her, inquired *why* it was at an end.

"He feels that the disgrace which has fallen upon us would be reflected upon him were he to make me his wife. Mother, there is no help for it; it *would* disgrace him."

"But where there is no real guilt there can be no real disgrace," objected Mrs. Channing. "I am firmly persuaded, however mysterious and unsatisfactory things appear, that Arthur is not guilty, and that time will prove he is not."

Constance could only shiver and sob. Knowing what she knew, she could entertain no hope.

"Poor child! poor child!" murmured Mrs. Channing, her tears dropping upon the fair young face as she gathered it to her sheltering bosom. "What have you done that this blight should extend to you?"

"Teach me to bear it, mother. It must be God's will." And Constance Channing lay in her resting-place, and there sobbed out her heart's grief, as she had used to do in her early girlhood.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN APPEAL TO THE DEAN.

THE first brunt of the edge worn off, Arthur Channing partially recovered his cheerfulness. The French have a proverb, which is familiar to all of us in these *French* days, when everybody knows the language, or professes to know it—"*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*" There is a great deal of truth in it, as experience teaches, and as Arthur found. "Where is the use of my dependence upon God," Arthur also reasoned with himself ten times a day, "if it does not serve to bear me up in this my first trouble? As well have been brought up next door to a heathen! Why, if I were guilty, I could only be as one ground down to the dust! Let me do the best I can under it, and go my way as if it had not happened, trusting all to God."

A good resolution, and one that none could have made and kept, unless he had learnt that good trust which is the surest beacon light we can possess in this world. Hour after hour, day after day, did that trust grow in Arthur Channing's heart. He felt a sure conviction that God would bring his innocence to light in His own good time, and that time he was content to wait for. Not at the expense of Hamish. In his brotherly love for Hamish, which this transaction had been unable to dispel, he would have shielded his reputation at any sacrifice to himself. He had grown to excuse Hamish far more than he could ever have excused himself had he been guilty of it; he constantly hoped that the sin might never be brought home to Hamish, even by the remotest suspicion, and that he would never fall again. Hamish was now so kind to Arthur—gentle in manner, considerately thoughtful, anxious to spare him, to resent any rude shaft that might be hurled at him. He had taken to profess his full belief in Arthur's innocence—not as loudly perhaps, but quite as urgently, as did Roland Yorke. "He would *prove* my innocence, and take the guilt to himself, but that it would bring ruin to my father," fondly soliloquized Arthur.

Arthur Channing's most earnest desire for the present was to obtain some employment. His weekly salary at Mr. Galloway's had been trifling; but still it was so much loss. He had gone to Mr. Galloway's, not so much to be of help to that gentleman, who really did not require a third clerk, as to get his hand into the routine of the office, against he should be articled. Hence his weekly pay had been almost nominal. Small though it was, he was anxious to replace it; and he sought to hear of something in the town—as yet without success. Persons were not willing to engage one on whom a doubt rested; and a very great doubt, in the opinion of the town, did rest upon Arthur. The manner in which the case had terminated—by Mr. Galloway refusing to swear he put the bank-note in the envelope, when it was known that Mr. Galloway *had* put it in, and that Mr. Galloway himself knew that he had put it in—told more against Arthur than the actual charge had done. It was not, you see, establishing Arthur's innocence; on the contrary, it rather tended to imply his guilt. "If I go on with this, he will be convicted; therefore I will withdraw it for his father's sake," was the motive of action which the town imputed to Mr. Galloway. His summary dismissal also from the office was urged against him. Altogether Arthur did not stand well with Helstonleigh, and fresh employment did not readily show itself. This was of little moment, comparatively speaking, while his good place in the cathedral was not perilled. But that was to come.

On the day previous to the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Channing, Arthur was seated at the organ in afternoon service, playing the anthem, when Mr. Williams came up. Arthur saw him with surprise. It was not the day for practising the choristers, therefore what could he want? A feeling of dread, that it might bode ill to him, came over Arthur.

Which feeling was borne out all too surely. "Channing," Mr. Williams began, scarcely giving himself time to wait until the service was over and the congregation were leaving, "the dean has been talking to me about this bother. What is to be done?"

The life-blood at his heart seemed to stand still and then go on again. His place there was about to be taken from him; he knew it. Must he become an idle, useless burden upon them at home?

"He met me this morning in High Street, and stopped me," continued Mr. Williams. "He considers that, if you were guilty of the theft, you ought not to be allowed to retain your place here. I told him you were not guilty—that I felt thoroughly convinced of it; but he listened coldly. The dean is a strict man, and I have always said it."

"He is a good man, and only strict in the cause of injustice," replied Arthur, who was himself too just to allow blame to rest where it was not due, even though it were to defend himself. "Did he give orders for my dismissal?"

"He has not done it yet. I said to him that when a man was accused wrongly it ought not to be a plea for all the world's trampling him down. He answered pretty warmly to that, that of course it ought not; but that, if appearances might be trusted, you were not accused wrongly."

Arthur sat scoring some music with his pencil. Never had he felt that appearances were against him more plainly than he felt it then.

"I thought I would step down and tell you this, Channing," Mr. Williams observed. "I shall not dismiss you, you may be sure of that; but if the dean puts forth his veto I cannot help myself. He is master of the cathedral, not I. I cannot think what possesses the people tc doubt you. They would not, if they had ten grains of sense."

The organist concluded his words as he hurried down the stairs; he was always much pressed for time. Arthur, a cold weight lying at his heart, put the music together and departed.

He traversed the nave, crossed the body, and descended the steps to the cloisters As he was passing the chapter-house, the doors opened, and Dr. Gardner came out in his surplice and trencher. He closed the doors after him, but not before Arthur had seen the dean seated alone at the table, a large folio before him. Both of them had just left the cathedral.

Arthur raised his hat to the canon, who acknowledged it, but, Arthur thought, very coldly. To a sore mind fancy is ever active. A thought flashed over Arthur that he would go there and then and speak to the dean.

Acting upon the moment's impulse, without premeditation as to what he should say, he turned back and laid his hand upon the door handle. A passing tremor as to the result arose within him; but he had learnt where help in need is ever to be obtained, and an earnestly breathed word went up then. The dean looked round, saw it was Arthur Channing who entered, rose from his seat, and awaited his approach.

"Will you pardon my intruding upon you here, Mr. Dean?" he began in his gentle, courteous manner; and with the urgency of the occasion all his energy seemed to come to him. Timidity and tremor vanished, and he stood before the dean a true gentleman and a fearless one. The dean still wore his surplice, and his trencher lay on the table near him. Arthur placed his own hat by its side. "Mr. Williams has just informed me that you cast a doubt as to the propriety of my still taking the organ," he added.

"True," said the dean. "It is not fitting that one upon whom so heavy an imputation lies should be allowed to continue his duty in this cathedral."

"But, sir, if that imputation be a mistaken one?"

"How are we to know that it is a mistaken one?" demanded the dean.

Arthur paused. "Sir, will you take my word for it? I am incapable of telling a lie. I have come to you to defend my own cause, and yet I can only do it by my bare word of assertion. You are not a stranger to the circumstances of my family, Mr. Dean; and I honestly avow that if this post is taken from me it will be felt as a serious loss. I have lost what little I had from Mr. Galloway; I trust I shall not lose this."

"You know, Channing, that I should be the last to do an unjust thing; you also may be aware that I respect your family very much," was the dean's reply. "But this crime which has been laid to your charge is a heavy one. If you were guilty of it, it cannot be overlooked."

"I was not guilty of it," Arthur impressively said, his tone full of emotion. "Sir! Mr. Dean! believe me. When I shall come to answer my Maker for my doings upon earth, I cannot speak with more earnest truth than I now speak to you. I am entirely innocent of the charge. I did not touch the money; I did not know that the money was lost until Mr. Galloway announced it to me some days afterwards."

The dean gazed at Arthur as he stood before him—at his tall form, noble even in its youthfulness, his fine ingenuous countenance, his earnest eye; it was impossible to associate such with the brand of guilt, and the dean's suspicious doubts melted away. If ever uprightness was depicted unmistakably in a human countenance, it shone out then from Arthur Channing's.

"But there appears, then, to be some mystery attaching to the loss, to the proceedings altogether," debated the dean.

"No doubt there may be; no doubt there is," was the reply of Arthur. "Sir," he impulsively added, "will you stand my friend so far as to grant me a boon?"

The dean wondered what he meant.

"Although I have thus asserted my innocence to you, and it is the solemn truth, there are reasons why I do not wish to speak out so unequivocally to others. Will you kindly regard this interview as a confidential one—not speaking of its purport even to Mr. Galloway?"

"But why?" asked the dean.

"I cannot explain. I can only throw myself upon your kindness, Mr. Dean, to grant the request. Indeed," he added, his face flushing, "my motive is an urgent one."

"The interview was not of my seeking, so you may have your boon," said the dean. "But I cannot see why you should not publicly assert it if, as you say, you are innocent."

"Indeed, I am innocent," repeated Arthur. "Should one ray of elucidation ever be thrown upon the affair, you will see, Mr. Dean, that I have spoken the truth"

"I will accept it as truth," said the dean. "You may continue to take the organ."

"I knew God would be with me in the interview!" thought Arthur, as he thanked the dean and left the chapter-house.

He did not go home immediately. He had a commission to execute in the town, and went to do it. It took him about an hour, which brought it to five o'clock. In returning through the Boundaries he encountered Roland Yorke, just released from that bane of his life, the office, for the day. Arthur told him how near he had been to losing the cathedral.

"By Jove!" uttered Roland, flying into one of his indignant fits. "A nice dean he is! He'd deserve to lose his own place if he had done it."

"Well, the danger is over for the present. I say, Yorke, does Galloway talk much about it?"

"Not he," answered Roland. "He is as sullen and crabbed as any old bear. I say to Jenkins that he is in a passion with himself for having sent you away, and I don't care if he hears me. There's an awful amount to do since you went. I and Jenkins are worked to death. And there'll be the busiest time in all the year coming on soon with the autumn rents and leases. I shan't stop long in it, I know."

Smiling at Roland's account of being "worked to death," for he knew how much the assertion was worth, Arthur continued his way. Roland continued his, and on entering his own house, met Constance Channing leaving it. He exchanged a few words of chatter with her, though it struck him that she looked unusually sad, and then found his way to the presence of his mother.

"What an uncommon pretty girl that Constance Channing is!" quoth he in his free, unceremonious fashion. "I wonder she condescends to come here to teach the girls!"

"I think I shall dismiss her, Roland," said Lady Augusta.

"I expect she'll dismiss herself, ma'am, without waiting for you to do it, now William Yorke has got bread and cheese, and a house to eat it in," returned Roland, throwing himself at full length on a sofa.

"Then you expect wrong," answered Lady Augusta. "If Miss Channing leaves, it will be by my dismissal. And I am not sure but I shall do it," she added, nodding her head.

"What for?" asked Roland lazily.

"It is not pleasant to retain, as instructress to my children, one whose brother is a thief."

Roland tumbled off the sofa, and rose up with a great cry—a cry of passionate anger, of aroused indignation. "What?" he thundered.

"Good gracious! are you going mad?" uttered my lady. "What is Arthur Channing to you, that you should take up his cause in this startling way upon every possible occasion?"

"He is this to me—that he has got nobody else to stand up for him," stuttered Roland, so excited as to impede his utterance. "We were both in the same office, and the shameful charge might have been cast upon me as it was cast upon him; it was all chance—luck. Channing is as innocent of it as you, mother; he is as innocent as that precious dean, who has been wondering whether he shall dismiss him from the cathedral. A charitable lot you all are!"

"I'm sure I don't want to be uncharitable,'" cried Lady Augusta, whose heart was kind enough in the main. "Half the town says he must be guilty, and what is one to think? Then you would not recommend me to let it make any difference to Miss Channing's coming here?"

"No!" burst forth Roland, in a tone that might have brought down the roof had it been glass. "I'd scorn such wicked injustice."

"If I were you, I'd 'scorn' putting myself into those fiery tempers upon other people's business," cried my lady.

"It is my business," retorted Roland. "Better go into tempers than be hard and unjust. What would William Yorke say at your speaking so of Miss Channing?"

Lady Augusta smiled. "It was the hearing what William Yorke had done that nearly decided me. He has broken with Miss Channing; and he has done well, Roland. It is not fit that he should take his wife from a disgraced family. I have been telling him so ever since it happened."

Roland stood before her, as if unable to digest the news, his mouth open, his eyes staring. "It is not true!" he shrieked.

"Indeed, it is perfectly true. I gathered a suspicion of it from William Yorke's manner to-day, and I put the question plainly to Miss Channing herself. Had they parted in consequence of this business of Arthur's? She acknowledged that it was so."

Roland turned white with honest anger. He dashed his hair from his brow, where the moisture stood in drops like peas. And with an ugly word, which would be more ugly still if written, he dashed down the stairs, four at a time, and flung out of the house, probably with the intention of having a little personal explosion with the Reverend William Yorke.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TASTE OF "TAN."

THE cloisters of Helstonleigh were echoing with the sounds of a loud dispute, according as little with their sacred character as with the fair beauty of the summer's afternoon.

The excitement caused in the college school by the rumour of Lady Augusta Yorke's having obtained the promise of the headmaster that her son should be promoted to the seniorship over the heads of Channing and Huntley had been smouldering ominously, and gathering all the more strength from the very fact that the boys appeared to be powerless in it. Powerless they were, in spite of Tom Channing's boast at the dinner-table that the school would not stand it tamely, and his meaning nod when Hamish had mockingly inquired whether the school intended to send Lady Augusta a challenge, or to recommend Mr. Pye to the surveillance of the dean.

In the first flow of their indignation, the boys, ringing the changes of rebellion freely, had avowed to one another that they would acquaint the dean with the headmaster's adoption of favouritism, and request his interference—like too many of us do when things happen that annoy us. We are only too prone to speak out our mind, to proclaim what our remedy or revenge shall be. We will do this, or do the other. The boasts seem feasible while our anger lasts, but when that has subsided into reason and coolness, and we see things in their true light, untinged by prejudice, we find that those boasts were but loud talking, and will not do to act upon. Thus it was with the Helstonleigh College boys. They had hurled forth in threats their indignation at the master, they had pretty nearly conned over the very words in which they should make known their grievance to the dean; but when the practical part came to be considered, their courage oozed out at their fingers' ends. The mice, you remember, passed a resolution in solemn conclave that their enemy, the old cat, should be belled—an excellent precaution, and only lacking one little facility to render it an efficient one: no mouse would undertake to do it.

To prefer a complaint to the dean of their headmaster was a daring measure, such as the school, with all its hardihood, had never yet attempted. It might recoil upon themselves, might be productive of no benefit to the question at issue, and only end in making the master their enemy. On the other hand, the boys were fully resolved not to submit tamely to a piece of favouritism so unjust, without doing something. In the midst of this perplexity, one of them suddenly mooted the suggestion that a written memorial should be sent to the headmaster from the school collectively, respectfully requesting him to allow the choice of senior to be made in the legitimate order of things—by merit or priority, but not by favour.

Lame as the suggestion was, the majority were for its adoption, simply because no other plan could be hit upon; some were against it. Hot arguments prevailed on both sides, and a few personal compliments, rather tending to break the peace, had been exchanged. The senior boy held himself aloof from acting personally; it was his place they were fighting for. Tom Channing and Huntley were red-hot against what they called the "sneaking," meaning the underhand work. Gerald Yorke was equally hot for non-interference, either to the master or the dean. Yorke protested it was not in the least true that Lady Augusta had been promised anything of the sort. In point of fact, there was no proof that she had, except her own assertion, made in the hearing of Jenkins. Gerald gravely declared that Jenkins had gone to sleep and dreamt it.

Affairs had been going on in a cross-grained sort of manner all day. The school, taking it as a whole, had been in-attentive; Mr. Pye had been severe; the second master had caned a whole desk, and threatened another, and double lessons had been set the upper boys for the following morning. Altogether, when the gentlemen were released at five o'clock, they were not in the sweetest of tempers, and entered upon a wordy war in the cloisters.

"What possessed you to take and tear up that paper you were surreptitiously scribbling at when Pye ordered you to go up and hand it in?" demanded Gaunt of George Brittle. "It was that which put him out with us all. Was it a love letter?"

"Who was to think he'd go and ask for it?" returned Brittle, an indifferent sort of gentleman, who liked to take things cool and easy. "Guess what it was."

"Don't talk to me about guessing!" imperiously spoke Gaunt. "I ask you what it was."

"Nothing less than the memorial to himself," laughed Brittle. "Some of us made a rough shell of it, and I thought I'd set on and copy it fair. When old Pye's voice came thundering, 'What's that you are so stealthily busy over, Mr. Brittle? Hand it in,' of course I could only tear it into minute pieces and pretend to be deaf."

"You had best not try it on again," said Gaunt. "Nothing puts out Pye like disobeying him to his face."

"Oh, doesn't it, though!" returned Brittle. "Cribs put him out the worst. He thought that was a crib, or he'd not have been so eager for it."

"What sort of a shell is it?" asked Harry Huntley. "Who drew it out?"

"It won't do at all," interposed Hurst. "The head of it is, 'Revered master,' and the tail, 'Yours affectionately.'"

A shout of laughter. Brittle's voice rose above the noise. "And the middle is an eloquent piece of composition, calculated to take the master's obdurate heart by storm, and move it to redress our wrongs."

"We have no wrongs to redress of that sort," cried Gerald Yorke.

"Being an interested party, you ought to keep your mouth shut," called out Hurst to Yorke.

"Keep yours shut first," retorted Yorke to Hurst. "Not being interested, there's no need to open yours at all."

"Let's see the thing," said Huntley.

Brittle drew from his pocket a sheet of a copy-book, tumbled, blotted, scribbled upon with the elegance that only a schoolboy can display. Several heads had been laid together, and a sketch of the memorial drawn out between them. Shorn of what Hurst had figuratively called the head and tail, and which had been appended for nonsense, it was not a bad production. The boys clustered round Brittle, looking over his shoulder as he read the composition aloud for the benefit of those who could not elbow space to see.

"It wouldn't be bad," said Huntley critically, "if it were done into good grammar."

"Into what?" roared Brittle. "The grammar's as good as you can produce any day, Huntley. Come!"

"I'll correct it for you," said Huntley coolly. "There are a dozen faults in it."

"The arrogance of those upper-desk fellows!" ejaculated Brittle. "The stops are not put in yet, and they have not the gumption to allow for them. You'll see what it is when it shall be written out properly, Huntley. It might be sent to the British Museum as a marvel of good English, there to be framed and glazed. I'll do it to-night."

"It's no business of yours, Mr. Brittle, that you should interfere to take an active part in it," resumed Gerald Yorke.

"No business of mine! That's good, when I am thinking of going in for the seniorship myself another time!"

"It's the business of the whole batch of us, if you come to that!" roared Bywater, trying to accomplish the difficult feat of standing on his head on the open mullioned window frame, thereby running the danger of coming to grief down amid the gravestones and grass of the college burial-yard. "If Pye does not get called to order now, he may lapse into the habit of passing over hard-working fellows with brains to exalt some good-for-nothing cake with none, because he happens to have a Dutchman for his mother. That *would* wash, that would!"

"You, Bywater—you! Do you mean that for me?" hotly demanded Gerald Yorke.

"As if I did!" laughed Bywater. "As if I mean it for any cake in particular—unless the cap happens to fit 'em. *I* don't say it does."

"The thing is this," struck in Hurst; "who will sign the paper? It's of no use for Brittle, or any other fellow, to be at the bother of writing it out, if nobody can be got to sign it."

"What do you mean? The school's ready to sign it."

"Are the seniors?"

With the seniors there was a hitch. Gaunt put himself practically out of the affair; Gerald Yorke would not sign it; and Channing could not. Huntley alone remained.

Why could not Channing sign it? Ah, there was the lever that was swaying and agitating the whole school this afternoon. Poor Tom Channing was not just now reposing upon rose leaves. What with his fiery temper and his fiery pride, Tom had enough to do to keep himself within bounds; for the school was resenting upon him the stigma that had fallen upon Arthur. Not the whole school, but quite sufficient of it. Not that they openly attacked Tom—he could have repaid that in kind—but they were sending him to Coventry. Some said they would not sign a petition to the master headed by Tom Channing—Tom, you remember, standing on the rolls next to Gaunt; they said that if Tom Channing were to succeed as senior of the school, the school would rise up in open rebellion. That this feeling against him was very much fostered by the Yorkes there was no doubt. Gerald was actuated by a twofold motive, one of which was, that it enhanced his own chance of the seniorship; the other arose from resentment against Arthur Channing for having brought disgrace upon the office which contained his brother Roland. Tod fraternized in this matter with Gerald, albeit the same could not be said of him in general: no two brothers in the school agreed less well than did the Yorkes. Both of them fully believed Arthur to be guilty.

"As good have the thing out now and settle it," exclaimed Griffin, who came next to Gerald Yorke, and would be the fourth senior when Gaunt should leave. "Are you fellows going to sign it or not?"

"To whom do you speak?" demanded Gaunt.

"Well, I speak to all," said Griffin, a good-humoured lad, but terribly mischievous, and, for some cause best known to himself, warmly espousing the cause of Gerald Yorke. "Shall you sign it, Gaunt?"

"No. But I don't say that I disapprove of it, mind you," added Gaunt. "Were I going in for the seniorship, and one below me were suddenly hoisted above my head and made cock of the walk, I'd know the reason why. It is not talking that would satisfy me, or grumbling either; I'd act."

"Gaunt doesn't sign it," proceeded Griffin, telling off the names upon his fingers. "That's one. Huntley, do you?"

"I don't come next to Gaunt," was Huntley's answer. "I'll speak in my right turn."

Tom Channing stood near to Huntley, his trencher stuck aside on his head, his honest face glowing. One arm was full of books, the other rested on his hip: his whole attitude bespoke self-possession; his looks, defiance. Griffin went on,—

"Gerald Yorke, do you sign it?"

"I'd see it farther first."

"That's two disposed of—Gaunt and Yorke," pursued Griffin. "Huntley, there's only you."

Huntley gave a petulant stamp. "I have told you I will not speak out of my turn. Yes, I will speak, though, as we want the affair set at rest," he resumed, changing his mind abruptly. "If Channing signs it, I will.—There. Channing, will you sign it?"

"Yes, I will," said Tom.

Then it was that the hubbub arose, the quarrelling, converting the cloisters into an arena. One word led to another. Fiery blood bubbled up; harsh things were spoken. Gerald Yorke and his party reproached Tom Channing with being a *disgrace* to the school's charter, through his brother Arthur. Huntley and a few more warmly espoused Tom's cause, of whom saucy Bywater was one, who roared out cutting sarcasms from his gymnasium on the window frame. Tom controlled himself better than might have been expected, but he and Gerald Yorke flung passionate retorts one to the other.

"It is not fair to cast in a fellow's teeth the shortcomings of his relations," continued Bywater. "What with our uncles and cousins, and mothers and grandmothers, there's sure to be one among them that goes off the square. Look at that rich lot next door to Lady Augusta's, with their carriages and servants, and soirées, and all the rest of their grandeur! Their uncle was hanged for sheep-stealing."

"I'd rather steal a sheep and be hanged for it than I'd help myself to a nasty bit of paltry money, and then deny that I did it!" foamed Gerald. "The suspicion might have fallen on my brother, but that he happened, by good luck, to be away that afternoon. My opinion is that Arthur Channing intended the suspicion to fall upon him."

A howl from Bywater. He had gone over, head foremost, to make acquaintance with the graves. They were too much engrossed to heed him.

"Your brother was a vast deal more likely to have helped himself to it than Arthur Channing," raged Tom. "He does a hundred dirty things every day that a Channing would rather cut off his arm than attempt."

The disputants' faces were nearly touching each other, and very fiery faces they were—that is, speaking figuratively. Tom's certainly was red enough, but Gerald's was white—white with passion. Some of the bigger boys stood close to prevent blows, which Gaunt was forbidding.

"I *know* he did it!" shrieked Gerald. "There!"

"You can't know it!" stamped Tom. "You don't know it!"

"I *do*. And for two pins I'd tell."

The boast was a vain boast, the heat of passion alone prompting it. Gerald Yorke was not scrupulously particular in calm moments, but little recked he what he said in violent ones. Tom repudiated it with scorn. But there was another upon whom the words fell with intense fear.

And that was Charley Channing. Misled by Gerald's positive and earnest tone, the boy really believed there must be some foundation for the assertion. A wild fear seized him lest Gerald should proclaim some startling fact, conveying a conviction of Arthur's guilt to the minds of the school. The blood forsook his face, his lips trembled, and he pushed his way through the throng till he touched Gerald.

"Don't say it, Gerald Yorke! Don't!" he imploringly whispered. "I have kept counsel for you."

"What?" said Gerald, wheeling round.

"I have kept your counsel about the surplice. Keep Arthur's in return, if you do know anything against him."

I wish you could have witnessed the change in Gerald Yorke's countenance! A streak of scarlet crossed its pallor, his eyes blazed forth defiance, and a tremor, as of fear, momentarily shook him. To the surprise of the boys, who had no notion what might have been the purport of Charley's whisper, he seized the boy by the arm, and fiercely dragged him away up the cloisters, turning the corner into the west quadrangle.

"Get down!" he hissed, "get down upon your knees, and swear that you'll never breathe a syllable of that calumny again! Do you hear me, boy?"

"No, I will not," said brave Charley.

Gerald drew in his lips. "You have heard of a wild tiger, my boy? There was one escaped from a caravan the other day, and killed a few. I am worse than a wild tiger now, and you had better not provoke me. Swear it, or I'll kill you!"

"I will not swear," repeated the child. "I'll try and keep the word I gave you, not to betray about the surplice —I will indeed; but don't you say again, please, that Arthur is guilty."

To talk of killing somebody, and to set about doing it, are two things. Gerald Yorke's "killing" would have amounted to no more than a good thrashing. He held the victim at arm's length, his eyes dilating, his right hand raised, when a head was suddenly propelled close upon them from the graveyard. Gerald was so startled as to drop his hold of Charley.

The head belonged to Stephen Bywater, who must have crept across the burial-groud and chosen that spot to emerge in, attracted probably by the noise. "What's the row?" asked he.

"I was about to give Miss Channing a taste of tan," replied Gerald, who appeared to suddenly cool down from his passion. "He'd have got it sweetly had you not come up. I'll tan you too, Mr. Bywater, if you come thrusting yourself like that where you are not expected and not wanted."

"Tan away," coolly responded Bywater. "I can tan again. What had the young one been up to?"

"Impudence," shortly answered Yorke.—"Mark you, Miss Channing, I have not done with you, though it is my pleasure to let you off for the present. Halloa! What's that?"

It was a tremendous sound of shrieking and yelling, as if some one amid the throng of boys was getting "tanned" there. Gerald and Charley flew off towards it, followed by Bywater, who propelled himself upwards through the mullioned frame in the best manner that he could. The sufferer proved to be Tod Yorke, who was writhing under the sharp correction of some tall fellow six feet high. To the surprise of Gerald, he recognized his brother Roland.

You may remember it was stated in the last chapter that Roland Yorke flew off in wild indignation from Lady Augusta's news of the parting of the Reverend Mr. Yorke and Constance Channing. Roland, in much inward commotion, was striding through the cloisters on his way to find that reverend divine, when he strode up to the throng of disputants, who were far too much preoccupied with their own concerns to observe him. The first distinct voice which struck upon Roland's ear above the general hubbub was that of his brother Tod.

When Gerald had rushed away with Charley Channing, it had struck Tod that he could not do better than take up the dispute on his own score. He forced himself through the crowd to where Gerald had stood in front of Tom Channing, and began. For some little time the confusion was so great he could not be heard, but Tod persevered; his manner was overbearing, his voice a loud one.

"I say that Tom Channing might have the decency to take himself out of the school. When our friends put us into it, they didn't expect we should have to consort with thieves' brothers."

"You contemptible little reptile, how dare you presume to cast aspersion at my brother?" scornfully uttered Tom. And the scorn was all he threw at him; for the seniors disdained, whatever the provocation, to attack personally those younger and less than themselves. Tod Yorke knew this.

"How dare I? Oh!" danced Tod, "I dare because I dare, and because it's true. When my brother Gerald says he knows it was Arthur Channing helped himself to the note, he does know it. Do you think," he added, improving upon Gerald's suggestion, "that my brother Roland could be in the same office and not know that he helped himself to it? He——"

It was at this unlucky moment that Roland had come up. He heard the words, dashed the intervening boys right and left, caught hold of Master Tod by the collar of his jacket, and lifted him from the ground, as an angry lion might lift a contemptible little animal which had enraged him. Roland Yorke was not an inapt type of an angry lion then, with his panting breath, his blazing eye, and his working nostrils.

"Take that! and that! and that!" cried he, giving Tod a taste of his strength. "*You* speak against Arthur Channing! Take that, you false little hound! and that! Let me catch you at it again, and I won't leave a whole bone in your body!"

Tod writhed; Tod howled; Tod shrieked; Tod roared for mercy. All in vain. Roland continued his "and thats!" and Gerald and the other two absentees came leaping up. Roland loosed him then, and turned his flashing eyes upon Gerald.

"Is it true that you said you knew Arthur Channing took the bank-note?"

"What if I did?" retorted Gerald.

"Then you told a lie—a lie as false as you are. If you don't eat your words, you are a disgrace to the name of Yorke.—Boys, believe *me!*" flashed Roland, turning to the wondering throng.—"Gaunt, *you* believe me: Arthur Channing never did take the note. I know it. I know it, I tell you! I don't care who it was took it, but it was not Arthur Channing. If you listen again to his false assertions," pointing scornfully to Gerald, "you'll show yourselves to be sneaking curs."

Roland stopped for want of breath. Bold Bywater, who was sure to find his tongue before anybody else, elbowed his way to the inner circle, and flourished about there, in complete disregard of the sad state of dilapidation he was in behind—a large portion of a very necessary article of attire having been, in some unaccountable manner, torn away by his recent fall.

"That's right, Roland Yorke!" cried he. "I'd scorn the action of bringing up a fellow's relations against him. Whether Arthur Channing took the note, or whether he didn't, what has that got to do with Tom, or with us? They are saying, some of them, that Tom Channing shan't sign a petition to the master about the seniorship!"

"What petition?" uttered Roland, who had not calmed down a whit.

"Why, about Pye giving it to Gerald Yorke over the others' heads," returned Bywater. "*You* know. Gerald's crowing over it like anything, but I say it's a shame. I heard him and Griffin say this morning that there was only Huntley to get over, now Tom Channing was put out of it through the bother about Arthur."

"What's the dean about that he does not give Pye a word of a sort?" asked Roland.

"The dean! If we could only get to tell the dean, it might be all right. But none of us dare."

"Thank you for your defence of Arthur," said Tom Channing to Roland Yorke, as the latter was striding away.

Roland looked back. "I am ashamed for all the lot of you! You might know that Arthur Channing needs no defence. He should not be aspersed in my school, Gaunt, if I were senior."

What with one thing and another, Roland's temper had not been so aroused for many a day. Gaunt ran after him, but Roland would not turn his head or speak.

"Your brothers are excited against Tom Channing, and that makes them hard upon him with regard to this accusation of Arthur," observed Gaunt. "Tom has gone on above a bit about Gerald's getting the seniorship over him and Huntley. Tom Channing can go on at a splitting rate when he likes, and he has not spared his tongue. Gerald, being the party interested, does not like it. That's what they were having a row over when you came up."

"Gerald has no more right to be put over Tom Channing's head than you have to be put over Pye's," said Roland angrily.

"Of course he has not," replied Gaunt. "But things don't go by 'rights,' you know. This business of Arthur Channing's has been quite a windfall for Gerald; he makes it into an additional reason why Tom, at any rate, should not have the seniorship. And there only remains Huntley."

"He does, does he!" exclaimed Roland. "If the dean——"

Roland's voice—it had not been a soft one—died away. The dean himself appeared suddenly at the door of the chapter-house, which they were then passing. Roland raised his hat, and Gaunt touched his trencher. The dean accosted the latter, his tone and manner less serene than usual.

"What is the cause of this unusual noise, Gaunt? It has disturbed me in my reading. If the cloisters are to be turned into a bear-garden, I shall certainly order them to be closed to the boys."

"I'll go and stop it at once, sir," replied Gaunt, touching his trencher again, as he hastily retired. He had no idea that the dean was in the chapter-house.

Roland, taking no time for consideration—he very rarely did take it, or any of the Yorkes—burst forth with the grievance to the dean. Not that Roland was one who cared much about justice or injustice in the abstract; but he was feeling excessively wroth with Gerald, and in a humour to espouse Tom Channing's cause against the world.

"The college boys are in a state of semi-rebellion, Mr

Dean, and are not so quiet under it as they might be. They would like to bring their cause of complaint to you, but they don't dare."

"Indeed?" said the dean.

"The senior boy leaves the school at Michaelmas," went on Roland, scarcely giving the dean time to say the word. "The one who stands first to step into his place is Tom Channing; the next is Huntley; the last is Gerald Yorke. There is a belief afloat that Mr. Pye means to pass over the two first, without reference to their merits or their rights, and to bestow it upon Gerald Yorke. The rumour is that he has promised this to my mother, Lady Augusta. Ought this to be so, Mr. Dean?—although my asking it may seem to be opposed to Lady Augusta's wishes and my brother's interests."

"Where have you heard this?" inquired the dean.

"Oh, the whole town is talking of it, sir. Of course, that does not prove its truth; but the college boys believe it. They think," said Roland pointedly, "that the dean ought to ascertain its grounds of foundation, and to interfere. Tom Channing is bearing the brunt of this false accusation on his brother, which some of the cowards are casting to him. It would be too bad were Pye to deprive him of the seniorship!"

"You deem the accusation on Arthur Channing to be a false one?" returned the dean.

"There never was a more false accusation brought in this world," replied Roland, relapsing into excitement. "I would answer for Arthur Channing with my own life. He is entirely innocent. Good-afternoon, Mr. Dean. If I stop longer, I may say more than's polite; there's no telling. Things that I have heard this afternoon have put my temper up."

He strode away towards the west door, leaving the dean looking after him with a smile. The dean had been on terms of friendship with Dr. Yorke, and was intimate with his family. Roland's words were a somewhat singular corroboration of Arthur Channing's private defence to the dean but an hour before.

Meanwhile Gaunt had gone up to scatter the noisy crew. "A nice row you have got me into with your quarrelling," he exclaimed. "The dean has been in the chapter-house all the while, and isn't he in a passion! He threatens to shut up the cloisters."

The announcement brought stillness, chagrin. "What a bothering old duff he is, that dean!" uttered Bywater. "He is always turning up when he's not wanted."

"Take your books and disperse in silence," was the command of the senior boy.

"Stop a bit," said Bywater, turning himself round and about for general inspection. "Look at me! Can I go home?"

"My!" roared the boys, who had been too preoccupied to be observant. "Haven't they come to grief!"

"But can I go through the streets?"

"Law, yes! Make a rush for it. Folks will know you have been in the wars."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEPARTURE.

I LIKE to see the skies fair and the sun shining on the morning fixed for a journey. It seems to whisper a promise that satisfaction from that journey shall be in store—a foolish notion, no doubt, but a pleasant one.

Never did there arise a more lovely morning to gladden the world than that fixed for Mr. and Mrs. Channing's departure. The August sky was without a cloud, the early dew glittered in the sun, and the bees and butterflies sported amidst the opening flowers.

Mr. Channing was up betimes, and had gathered his children around him—all. Tom and Charles had, by permission, holiday that morning from early school, and Constance had not gone to Lady Augusta Yorke's. The very excitement and bustle of preparation had appeared to have a beneficial effect upon Mr. Channing; perhaps it was the effect of the great hope which had seated itself in his heart and was at work there. But Mr. Channing did not count upon this hope one whit more than he could help, for disappointment *might* be the ending. In this, the hour of parting from his home and his children, the hope seemed to have buried itself five fathom deep, if not to have died away completely. Who in a similar position to Mr. Channing has not felt this depression on quitting a beloved home?

The parting had been less sad but for the dark cloud hanging over Arthur. Mr. Channing had no resource but to believe him guilty, and his manner to him had grown cold and stern. It was a pleasing sight, could you have looked in upon it that morning—one that would put you in mind of that happier world where partings are not.

For it was to that world that Mr. Channing had been carrying the thoughts of his children in these the last moments. The Bible was before him, but all that he had chosen to read was a short psalm. And then he prayed God to bless them, to keep them from evil, to be their all-powerful Protector. There was not a dry eye present; and Charles and Annabel —Annabel with all her wildness—sobbed aloud.

He was standing up now, supported by Hamish, his left hand leaning heavily, also for support, on the shoulder of Tom. Oh! but Arthur felt it keenly—felt it as if his heart would break. It was Tom whom his father had especially called to his aid; *he* was passed over. It was hard to bear.

He was giving a word of advice, of charge, to all. "Constance, my pretty one, the household is in your charge; you must take care of your brothers' comforts. And, Hamish, my son, I leave Constance to the care of *you*. Tom, let me enjoin you to keep your temper within bounds, particularly with regard to that unsatisfactory matter, the seniorship. Annabel, be obedient to your sister, and give her no care; and Charley, my little darling, be loving and gentle as you always are. Upon my return—if I shall be spared to return——"

"Father," exclaimed Arthur, in a wailing burst of irrepressible feeling, "have you no word for *me?*"

Mr. Channing laid his hand upon the head of Arthur. "Bless, oh, bless this my son!" he softly murmured. "And may God forgive him if he be indeed the erring one we fear!"

But a few minutes had elapsed since Mr. Channing had repeated aloud the petition in the prayer taught us by our Saviour—"Lead us not into temptation." It had come quickly to one of his hearers. If ever temptation assailed a heart it assailed Arthur's then. "Not I, father; it is Hamish who is guilty; it is for him I have to bear. Hamish, whom you are caressing, was the true culprit; I, whom you despise, am innocent." Words such as these might have hovered on Arthur's lips: they were near doing it, but for the strangely imploring look cast to him from the tearful eyes of Constance, who read his struggle. Arthur remembered One who had endured temptation far greater than this, who is ever ready to grant the same strength of patience to those who need it. A few moments, and the struggle and the temptation faded away, and he had not yielded to it.

"Children, I do not like these partings. They always sadden my heart. They make me long for that life where partings shall be no more. Oh, my dear ones, do you all strive on to attain to that blessed life! Think what would be our woeful grief—if such can assail us there, if memory of the past may be allowed us—should we find any one of our dear ones absent, of you who now stand around me! I speak to you all—not more to one than to another—absent through his own fault, his own sin, his own carelessness! O children! you cannot tell my love for you, my anxious care lest any of you should lose this inconceivable blessing. Work on, strive on; and if we never meet again here——"

"O papa, papa," wildly sobbed Annabel, "we shall meet again! You will come back well."

"I trust we shall! I do trust I may! God is ever merciful and good. All I would have said was that my life is uncertain—that, if it be His will not to spare me, I shall but have preceded you to that better land. My blessing be upon you, my children! God's blessing be upon you! Fare you well."

In the bustle of getting Mr. Channing to the fly, Arthur was left alone with his mother. She clung to him, sobbing much. Even her faith in him was shaken. When the rupture occurred between Mr. Yorke and Constance, Arthur never spoke up to say, "There is no cause for parting; I am not guilty." Mrs. Channing was not the only one who had expected him to say this, or something equivalent; and she found her expectation vain. Arthur had maintained a studied silence. Of course it could only tell against him.

"Mother! my darling mother! I would ask you to trust me still, but that I see how difficult it is for you!" he said, as hot tears were wrung from his aching heart.

Hamish came in. Arthur, not caring to exhibit his emotion for everybody's benefit, retired to the distant window. "My father is in, all comfortable," said Hamish. "Mother, are you sure you have everything?"

"Everything, I believe."

"Well, put this into your private purse, mother mine. You'll find a use for it."

It was a ten-pound note. Mrs. Channing began protesting she should have enough without it.

"Mrs. Channing, I know your 'enoughs,'" laughed Hamish in his very gayest and lightest tone. "You'll be for going without dinner every other day, fearing the funds won't last. If you don't take it, I shall send it after you to-morrow."

"Thank you, my dear, considerate boy!" she gratefully said, as she put up the money, which would, in good truth, prove useful. "But how have you been able to get it for me?"

"As if a man could not save up his odd sixpences for a rainy day!" quoth Hamish.

She implicitly believed him. She had entire faith in her darling Hamish; and the story of his embarrassments had not reached her ear. Arthur heard all from his distant window. "For that very money, given to my mother as a gift from *him*, I must suffer," was the rebellious thought that ran through his mind.

The fly started, Mr. and Mrs. Channing and Charley inside, Hamish on the box with the driver. Tom galloped to the station on foot. Of course the boys were eager to see them off. But Arthur, in his refined sensitiveness, would not put himself forward to make one, and nobody asked him to do so.

The train was on the point of starting. Mr. and Mrs. Channing were in their places, certain arrangements having been made for the convenience of Mr. Channing, who was partially lying across from one seat to the other; Hamish and the others were standing round for a last word, when there came one, fighting his way through the platform's bustle, pushing porters, and anybody else who impeded his progress, to the right-about. It was Roland Yorke.

"Haven't I come up at a splitting pace! I overslept myself, Mr. Channing, and thought I should not be in time to give you a God-speed. I hope you'll have a pleasant time, and come back cured, sir!"

"Thank you, Roland. These heartfelt wishes from you all are very welcome."

"I say, Mr. Channing," continued Roland, leaning over the carriage window, in utter disregard to danger, "if you should hear of any good place abroad that you think I might do for, I wish you'd speak a word for me."

"Place abroad!" repeated Mr. Channing, while Hamish burst into a laugh.

"Yes," said Roland. "My brother George knew a fellow who went over to Austria or Prussia, or some of those places, and dropped into a very good thing there, quite by accident. It was connected with one of the embassies, I think—five or six hundred a year, and but little to do."

Mr. Channing smiled. "Windfalls like that are rare. I fear I am not likely to hear of anything of the sort. But what has Mr. Galloway done to you, Roland? You are a fixture with him."

"I am tired of Galloway's," frankly confessed Roland. "I didn't enjoy myself there before Arthur left, but I am fit to hang myself since, with nobody to speak to but that calf of a Jenkins! If Galloway will take on Arthur again, and do him honour, I'll stop and make the best of it; but if he won't——"

"Back! back! Hands off, there! Are you mad?" And amidst much shouting and running, and dragging back careless Roland out of danger, the train steamed out of the station.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ABROAD.

A POWERFUL steamer was cutting smoothly through the waters. The large expanse of sea lay around, dotted with its fishing-boats, which had come out with the night's tide; a magnificent vessel, her spars glittering in the rising sun, might be observed in the distance, and the gray, misty sky overhead gave promise of a hot and lovely day.

Some of the passengers lay on deck, where they had stationed themselves the previous night, preferring its open air to the closeness of the cabins in the event of rough weather. Rough weather they need not have feared The passage had been perfectly calm, the sea smooth as a lake; not a breath of wind had there been to help the good ship upon her course; steam had to do its full work. But for this dead calm, the fishing-craft would not be huddling in, close in-shore, looking like a shoal of sea-gulls more than like themselves. Had a wind, ever so gentle, sprung up, they would have put out farther to more prolific waters.

A noise, a shout, a greeting! and some of the passengers, already awake, but lying lazily yet, sprang up to see what caused it. It was a meeting steamer, bound for home, for the great metropolis which they had quitted not seventeen hours previously. The respective captains exchanged salutes from their places aloft, and the fine boats cut past each other.

"*Bon voyage! bon voyage!*" shouted out a little French boy to the retreating steamer.

"We have had a fine passage, captain," observed a gentleman who was stretching himself and stamping about the deck after his night's repose on the hard bench.

"Middling," responded the captain, to whom a dead calm was not quite so agreeable as it was to his passengers. "Should ha' been in all the sooner for a breeze."

"How long shall we be now?"

"A good time yet. Can't go along as if the wind was at our backs."

The steamer made good progress, however, in spite of not being helped by the faithless wind. It glided up the Scheldt, and by-and-by the beautiful spire of Antwerp Cathedral was discerned, rising against the clear sky. Mrs. Channing, who had been one of those early astir, went back to her husband. He was lying where he had been placed when the vessel left St. Katherine's Docks.

"We shall soon be in, James. I wish you could see that noble spire. I have been searching for it ever so long; it is in sight now. Hamish told me to keep a lookout for it."

"Did he?" replied Mr. Channing. "How did Hamish know it might be seen?"

"From the guide-books, I suppose, or by hearsay, possibly. Hamish seems to know everything. What a favour able passage we have had."

"Ay," said Mr. Channing. "What I should have done in a rough passage I cannot tell. The dread of it has been pressing on me like a nightmare since our voyage was fixed."

Mrs. Channing smiled. "Troubles seldom come from the quarter we anticipate them."

Later, when Mrs. Channing was once more leaning over the side of the vessel, a man came up and put a card in her hand, jabbering away in German to her at the same time. The Custom House officers had come on board then.

"Oh, dear, if Constance were but here! It is for the speaking that we shall miss her," thought Mrs. Channing. "I am sorry that I do not understand you," she said, turning to the man.

"Madame want an hot-el? That hot-el a good one," tapping the card with his fingers, and dexterously turning the reverse side upward, where was set forth in English the desirableness of a certain Antwerpian hotel.

"Thank you, but we make no stay at Antwerp; we go straight on at once." And she would have handed back the card.

No, he would not receive it. "Madame might be wanting an hot-el at another time—on her return, it might be. If so, would she patronize it? It was a good hot-el—perfect!"

Mrs. Channing slipped the card into her reticule, and searched in her private directions to see what hotel Hamish had marked down, should they require one at Antwerp. She found it to be the Hotel de Parc—not the one recommended on the man's card. Hamish certainly had contrived to acquire for them a vast fund of information, and as it turned out, information to be relied on.

Breakfast was to be obtained on board the steamer, and they availed themselves of it, as did a few of the other passengers. Some delay occurred in the bringing the steamer to the side after they arrived. Whether from that cause, or the captain's grievance—want of wind—or from both, they were in later than they ought to have been. When the first passenger put his foot on land they had been out twenty hours.

Mr. Channing was the last to be removed, as with him there was aid required. Mrs. Channing stood on shore, at the head of the ladder, looking down anxiously, lest in any way hurt should come to him, when she found a hand laid upon her shoulder, and a familiar voice saluted her.

"Mrs. Channing! Who would have thought of seeing you here! Have you dropped from the moon?"

Not only was the voice familiar, but the face also. In the surprise of being so addressed, in the confusion around her, Mrs. Channing positively did not for a moment recognize it. All she saw was that it was a *home* face. "Mr. Huntley!" she exclaimed, when she gathered her senses; and in the rush of pleasure of meeting him, of not feeling utterly alone in that strange land, she put both her hands into his. "I may return your question by asking where you have dropped from. I thought you were in the south of France."

"So I was," he answered, "until a few days ago, when business brought me to Antwerp. A gentleman is living here whom I wished to see.—Take care, my men!" he continued to the English sailors who were carrying up Mr. Channing. "Mind your footing." But the ascent was accomplished in safety, and Mr. Channing placed in a carriage.

"Do you understand their lingo ?" Mr. Huntley asked, as the landing waiters talked and chattered around.

"Not a syllable," she answered. "I can manage a little French, but this is as a sealed book to me. Is it German or Flemish ?"

"Flemish, I conclude," he said laughingly ; "but my ears will not tell me any more than yours. I should have done well to bring Ellen with me. She said to me, in her saucy way, 'Papa, when you get among the French and Germans, you will be wishing for me to interpret for you.'"

"As I have been wishing for Constance," replied Mrs. Channing. "In our young days it was no more thought essential to learn German than it was to learn Hindustani. French was only partially taught."

"Quite true," said Mr. Huntley. "I managed to rub through France after a fashion, but I don't know what the natives thought of my French. What I did know I have half forgotten. But now for explanations. Of course Mr. Channing is come to try the effect of the German springs ?"

"Yes ; and we have such hopes," she answered. "There does appear to be a probability that not only relief but a cure may be effected ; otherwise, you may be sure, we should not have ventured on the expense."

"I always said Mr. Channing ought to try them."

"Very true ; you did so. We were only waiting, you know, for the termination of the chancery suit. It is terminated, Mr. Huntley, and against us."

Mr. Huntley had been abroad since June, travelling in different parts of the Continent ; but he had heard from home regularly, chiefly from his daughter, and this loss of the suit was duly communicated with other news.

"Never mind," said he to Mrs. Channing. "Better luck next time."

He was of a remarkably gay, pleasant disposition, in temperament not unlike Hamish Channing. A man of keen intellect was Mr. Huntley ; his fine face expressed it. The luggage collected, they rejoined Mr. Channing.

"I have scarcely said a word to you," Mr. Huntley cried, taking his hand. "But I am better pleased to see you here than I should be anybody else living. It is the first step towards a cure. Where are you bound for ?"

"For Borcette. It is——"

"I know it," interrupted Mr. Huntley. "I was at it a year or two ago—one of the little Brunnens, near Aix-la-Chapelle. I stayed a whole week there. I have a great mind to proceed thither with you now and settle you there."

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Mr. Channing, his face lighting up as the faces of invalids will light up at the anticipated companionship of a friend. "If you can spare the time, do come with us!"

"My time is my own. The business that brought me here is concluded, and I was thinking of leaving to-day. Having nothing to do after my early breakfast, I strolled down to watch in the London steamer, little thinking I should see you arrive by it. That's settled, then ; I will accompany you as far as Borcette and see you installed."

"When do you return home ?"

"Now ; and glad enough I shall be to get there. Travelling is delightful for a change, but when you have had sufficient of it, home peeps out in the vista with all its charms."

The train which Mr. and Mrs. Channing had intended to take was already gone, through the delay in the steamer reaching Antwerp, and they had to wait for another. When it started, it had them safely in it, and Mr. Huntley with them. Their route lay through part of the Netherlands, through Malines, through some beautiful valleys—so beautiful that it is worth going the whole distance from England to see.

"What is this disturbance about the seniorship and Lady Augusta Yorke ?" Mr. Huntley asked, as it suddenly occurred to his recollection in the earlier part of their journey. "Master Harry has written me a letter full of notes of exclamation and indignation, saying I 'ought to come home and see about it.' What is it ?"

Mr. Channing explained—at least, as much as he knew of it to explain. "It has given rise to a good deal of dissatisfaction in the school," he added, "but I cannot think, for my own part, that it can have any foundation. Mr. Pye would not be likely to give a promise of the kind, either to Lady Augusta or to any other of the boys' friends."

"If he attempted to give one to me, I should throw it back to him with a word of a sort," hastily rejoined Mr. Huntley in a warm tone. "Nothing can possibly be more unjust than to elevate one boy over another's head undeservedly; nothing, in my opinion, can be more pernicious. It is enough to render the boy himself unjust through his life, to give him loose ideas of right and wrong. Have you not inquired into it?"

"No," replied Mr. Channing.

"I shall. If I find reason to suspect there may be cause, I shall certainly inquire into it. Underhand work of that sort goes, with me, against the grain. I can stir in it with a better grace than you can," Mr. Huntley added, "my son being pretty sure not to succeed to the seniorship so long as yours is above him to take it. Tom Channing will make a good senior—better than Harry would. Harry, in his easy indifference, would suffer the school to lapse into insubordination; Tom will keep a tight hand over it."

A sensation of pain darted across the heart of Mr. Channing. Only the day previous to his quitting home he had accidentally heard a few words spoken between Tom and Charley, which had told him that Tom's chance of the seniorship was perilled through the business connected with Arthur. Mr. Channing had then questioned Tom, and found that it was so. He must speak of this now to Mr. Huntley, however painful it might be to himself to do so. It were more manly to meet it openly than to bury it in silence, and let Mr. Huntley hear of it (if he had not yet heard of it) as soon as he got to Helstonleigh.

"Have you heard anything particular about Arthur lately?" inquired Mr. Channing.

"Of course I have," was the answer. "Ellen did not fail to give me a full account. I congratulate you on possessing such sons."

"Congratulate! To what do you allude?" asked Mr. Channing.

"To Arthur's seeking after Jupp's place as soon as he knew that the suit had failed. He's a true Channing. I am glad he got it."

"Not to that—I did not allude to that," hastily rejoined Mr. Channing. And then, with downcast eyes and a downcast heart, he related sufficient to put Mr. Huntley in possession of the facts.

Mr. Huntley heard the tale with incredulity, a smile of ridicule parting his lips. "Suspect Arthur of theft!"

he exclaimed. "What next? Had I been in my place on the magistrates' bench that day I should have dismissed the charge at once upon such defective evidence. Channing, what is the matter?"

Mr. Channing laid his hand upon his aching brow, and Mr. Huntley had to bend over him to catch the whispered answer. "I do fear that he may be guilty. If he is not guilty, some strange mystery altogether is attached to it."

"But why do you fear that he is guilty?" asked Mr. Huntley in surprise.

"Because his own conduct, relative to the charge, is so strange. He will not assert his innocence; or if he does attempt to assert it, it is done with a faint, hesitating manner and tone that can only impart the impression of falsehood instead of truth."

"It is utterly absurd to suppose your son Arthur capable of the like guilt. He is one of those whom it is impossible to doubt—noble, true, honourable! No; I would suspect myself before I could suspect Arthur Channing."

"I would have suspected myself before I had suspected him," impulsively spoke Mr. Channing. "But there are the facts, coupled with his non-denial. He could not deny it even to the satisfaction of Mr. Galloway—did not attempt it. Had he done so, Galloway would not have turned him from the office."

Mr. Huntley fell into thought, revolving over the details as they had been related to him. That Arthur was the culprit his judgment entirely repudiated, and he came to the conclusion that he must be screening another. He glanced at Mrs. Channing, who sat in troubled silence.

"You do not believe Arthur guilty?" he said in a low tone, suddenly bending over to her.

"I do not know what to believe: I am racked with doubt and pain," she answered. "Arthur's private words to me are only compatible with entire innocence; but then, what becomes of the broad facts—of his strange appearance of guilt before the world? God can bring his innocence to light, he says, and he is content to wait His time."

"If there is a mystery, I'll try and come to the bottom of it when I reach Helstonleigh," thought Mr. Huntley. "Arthur's not guilty, whoever else may be."

It was impossible to shake his firm faith in Arthur Channing. Mr. Huntley was one of those few who read characters strongly and surely, and he *knew* Arthur was incapable of doing wrong. Had his eyes witnessed Arthur positively steal the bank-note, his mind, his judgment would have refused credence to his eyes. You may therefore judge that neither then nor afterwards was he likely to admit the possibility of Arthur's own guilt.

"And the college school is saying Tom shall not stand for the seniorship!" he resumed aloud. "Does my son say it?"

"Some of them are saying it—I believe the majority of the school. I do not know whether your son is amongst the number."

"He had better not let me find him to be so," cried Mr. Huntley. "But now, don't you suffer this affair to worry you," he added, turning heartily to Mr. Channing. "If Arthur's guilty, I'll eat him; and I shall make it my business to look into it closely when I reach home. You are incapacitated, my old friend, and I shall act for you."

"Did Ellen not mention this in writing to you?"

"No—the sly puss! Catch Miss Ellen writing to me anything that might tell against the Channings."

A silence followed. The subject which the words seemed to hint at was one upon which there could be no openness between them. A warm attachment had sprung up between Hamish Channing and Ellen Huntley; but whether Mr. Huntley would sanction it, now that the suit had failed, was doubtful. He had never explicitly sanctioned it previously—tacitly, in so far as that he had not interfered to prevent Ellen meeting Hamish in society, in friendly intercourse. Probably he had never looked upon it in a serious point of view; possibly he had never noticed it. Hamish had not spoken, even to Ellen; but that they did care for each other very much was evident to those who chose to open their eyes.

"No two people in all Helstonleigh were so happy in their children as you!" exclaimed Mr. Huntley, "or had such cause to be."

"None happier," assented Mrs. Channing, the tears rising to her eyes. "They were, and are, so good, so dutiful, so loving. Would you believe that Hamish, little as he can have to spare, has been one of the chief contributors to help us here?"

Mr. Huntley lifted his eyebrows with a surprised gesture. "Hamish has! How did he accomplish it?"

"He has, indeed. I fancy he has been saving up with this view. Dear, self-denying Hamish!"

Now, it just happened that Mr. Huntley was cognizant of Mr. Hamish's embarrassments, so how the "saving up" could have been effected he was at a loss to know. "Careless Hamish may have borrowed it," thought he to himself, "but saved it up he has not."

"What are we approaching now?" interrupted Mr. Channing.

They were approaching the Prussian frontier; and there they had to change trains—more embarrassment for Mr. Channing. After that, they went on without interruption, and arrived safely at the terminus, almost close to Borcette, having been about four hours on the road.

"Borcette at last!" cheerily exclaimed Mr. Huntley, as he shook Mr. Channing's hand. "Please God, it may prove to you a place of healing!"

"Amen!" was the softly-murmured answer.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Channing was delighted with Borcette. Poor Mr. Channing could as yet see but little of it. It was an unpretending, small place, scarcely ten minutes' distance from Aix-la-Chapelle, to which she could walk through an avenue of trees. She had never before seen a bubbling fountain of boiling water, and regarded those of Borcette with much interest. The hottest, close to the Hotel Rosenbad, where they sojourned, boasted a temperature of more than 150° Fahrenheit. It was curious to see it rising in the very middle of the street. Other things amused her too; in fact, all she saw was strange, and bore its peculiar interest. She watched the factory people flocking to and fro at stated hours in the day—for Borcette has its factories for woollen fabrics and looking-glasses—some thousands of souls, their promenade as regular and steady as that of schoolgirls on their daily march under the governess's eye. The men wore blue blouses; the women, neat and clean, wore neither bonnets nor caps, but their hair was twisted smoothly round their heads, artistically, as if done by a hairdresser. Not one, women or girls, but wore enormous gold earrings; and the girls plaited their hair and let it hang behind. What a contrast they presented to their class in England! Mrs. Channing had, not long before, spent a few weeks in one of our large factory towns in the north. She remembered still the miserable, unwholesome, dirty, poverty-stricken appearance of the factory workers there—their almost *disgraceful* appearance; she remembered still the boisterous or the slouching manner with which they proceeded to their work, their language anything but choice. But these Prussians looked a respectable, well-conducted, well-to-do body of people; their clothes were good, their manners and conduct admirable. Where could the great difference lie? Not in wages, for the English were better paid than the Germans. We should go abroad to learn economy, and many other desirable accompaniments of daily life. Nothing amused her more than to see the laundresses, and housewives generally, washing the linen at these boiling springs—wash, wash, wash! chatter, chatter, chatter! She thought they must have no water in their own homes, for they would flock in numbers to the springs with their kettles and jugs to fill them.

It was Doctor Lamb who had recommended them to the Hotel Rosenbad, and they found the recommendation a good one. Removed from the narrow, dirty, offensive streets of the little town, it was desirably situated. The promenade, with its broad walks, its smart company (many of them invalids nearly as helpless as Mr. Channing), and its oft-playing musical bands, was right in front of the hotel windows, a pleasant sight for Mr. Channing until he could get about there himself. On the heights behind the hotel two churches were situated, and the sound of their musical services would be wafted down in the softest and sweetest strains of melody. In the neighbourhood there was a shrine, to which pilgrims flocked. Mrs. Channing regarded them with interest, some with their alpenstocks, some in fantastic dresses, some with strings and strings of beads, which they knelt and told, and her thoughts went back to the old times of the Crusaders. All she saw pleased her. But for the anxiety as to what would be the effect of the new treatment upon her husband, and the ever-lively trouble regarding Arthur, it would have been a time of real delight to Mrs. Channing.

They could not have been better off than in the Hotel Rosenbad. Their rooms were on the second floor—a small, exquisitely pretty sitting-room, bearing a great resemblance to most Continental sitting-rooms, its carpet red, its muslin curtains snowy white; from this opened a bedroom, containing two beds—all as convenient as it could be. Their meals, three per day, were excellent, the dinner-table in particular being abundantly supplied. For all this they paid five francs per day each, and the additional accommodation of having the repasts served in their room, on account of Mr. Channing, was not regarded as an extra expense. Their wax-lights were charged extra, and that was all. I wish English hotelkeepers would take a lesson from Borcette!

The doctor gave great hopes of Mr. Channing. Of course his expense, with the cost of the baths, was additional; the laundress was also. The doctor's opinion was that had Mr. Channing come to these baths when he was first taken ill, his confinement would have been but trifling. "You will find the greatest benefit in a month," said the doctor in answer to the anxious question, How long the restoration might be coming? "In two months you will walk charmingly; in three, you will be well." Cheering news, if it could only be borne out.

"I will not have you say 'if'" cried Mr. Huntley, who had made one in the consultation with the doctor. "You are told that it will be so, under God's blessing, and all you have to do is to anticipate it."

Mr. Channing smiled. They were stationed round the open window of the sitting-room, he on the most comfortable of sofas, Mrs. Channing watching the gay prospect below, and thinking she should never be tired of looking at it. "There can be no hope without fear," said he.

"But I'd not think of the fear; I'd bury that altogether," said Mr. Huntley. "You have nothing to do here but to apply the remedies, look forward with confidence, and be as happy as the day's long."

"I will if I can," said Mr. Channing, with some approach to gaiety. "I should not have gone to the expense of coming here but that I had great hopes of the result."

"Expense, you call it! I call it a marvel of cheapness."

"For your pocket. Cheap as it is, it will tell upon mine. But if it does effect my restoration, I shall soon repay it tenfold."

"'If' again! It will effect it, I say. What shall you do with Hamish when you can resume your place at the head of your office?"

"Let me resume it first, Huntley."

"There you go! Now, if you were only as sanguine and sure as you ought to be, I could recommend Hamish to something good to-morrow."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"But if you persist in saying you shall not get well, or that there's a doubt whether you will get well, where's the use of my doing it? So long as you are incapacitated, Hamish must be a fixture in Guild Street."

"True."

"So I shall say no more about it at present. But remember, my old friend, that when you shall be upon your legs, and have no further need of Hamish—who, I expect, will not care to drop down to a clerk again where he has been master—I may be able to help him to something; so do not let anticipations on his score worry you. I suppose you will be losing Constance soon?"

Mr. Channing gave vent to a groan: a sharp attack of his malady pierced his frame just then. Certain reminiscences, caused by the question, may have helped its poignancy; but of that Mr. Huntley had no suspicion.

In the evening, when Mrs. Channing was sitting under the acacia trees, Mr. Huntley joined her, and she took the opportunity of alluding to the subject. "Do not mention it again in the presence of my husband," she said. "Talking of it can only bring it before his mind with more vivid force. Constance and Mr. Yorke have parted."

Had Mrs. Channing told him the cathedral had parted, Mr. Huntley could not have felt more surprise. "Parted!" he ejaculated. "From what cause?"

"It occurred through this dreadful affair of Arthur's. I fancy the fault was as much Constance's as Mr. Yorke's, but I do not know the exact particulars. He did not like it; he thought, I believe, that the marrying a sister of Arthur's would tinge his honour—or she thought it. Anyway, they parted."

"Had William Yorke been engaged to my daughter, and given her up upon so shallow a plea, I should have been disposed to chastise him," intemperately spoke Mr. Huntley, carried away by his strong feeling.

"But I say I fancy the giving up was on Constance's side," repeated Mrs. Channing. "She has a keen sense of honour, and she knows the pride of the Yorkes."

"Pride such as that would be the better for being taken down a notch," returned Mr. Huntley. "I am sorry for this. The accusation has indeed been productive of serious effects. Why did not Arthur go to William Yorke and avow his innocence, and tell him there was no cause for their parting? Did he not do so?"

Mrs. Channing shook her head only by way of answer; and as Mr. Huntley scrutinized her pale, sad countenance, he began to think there must be greater mystery about the affair than he had supposed. He said no more.

On the third day he quitted Borcette, having seen them, as he expressed it, fully installed, and pursued his route homewards, by way of Lille, Calais, and Dover. Mr. Huntley was no friend to long sea passages: people with plenty of money in their pockets rarely are.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN OMINOUS COUGH.

"I SAY, Jenkins, how you cough!"

"Yes, sir, I do. It's a sign that the autumn weather's coming on. I have been pretty free from it all the summer. I think the few days I lay in bed through that fall must have been beneficial to my chest, for since then I have hardly coughed at all. This last day or two it has been bad again."

"What cough d'ye call it?" went on Roland Yorke. You may have guessed he was the speaker. "A churchyard cough?"

"Well, I don't know, sir," said Jenkins. "It *has* been called that before now. I dare say it will be the end of me at last."

"Cool!" ejaculated Roland—"cooler than I should be if I had a cough, or any plague of the sort, that was likely to be *my* end. Does it trouble your mind, Jenkins?"

"No, sir, not exactly. It gives me rather downhearted thoughts now and then, till I remember that everything is sure to be ordered for the best."

"The best! Should you call it for 'the best' if you were to go off?" demanded Roland, drawing pen-and-ink chimneys, with clouds of smoke coming out, upon his blotting-paper as he sat lazily at his desk.

"I dare say, sir, if that were to happen, I should be enabled to see that it was for the best. There's no doubt of it."

"According to that theory, everything that happens must be for the best. You may as well say that pitching on to your head and half killing yourself was for the best! Moonshine, Jenkins!"

"I think even that accident was sent for some wise purpose, sir. I know, in some respects, it was very palpably for the best. It afforded me some days of quiet, of serious reflection, and it served to show how considerate everybody was for me."

"And the pain?"

"That was soon over, sir. It made me think of that better place where there will be no pain. If I am to be called there early, Mr. Roland, it is well that my thoughts should be led to it."

Roland stared with all his eyes. "I say, Jenkins, what do you mean? You have got nothing serious the matter with you?"

"No, sir—nothing but the cough, and a weakness that I feel. My mother and my brother both died of the same thing, sir."

"Oh, nonsense!" returned Roland. "Because one's mother dies, is that any reason why we should fall into low spirits and take up the notion that we are going to die, and look out for it? I am surprised at you, Jenkins."

"I am not in low spirits, sir; and I am sure I don't look out for it. I might have looked out for it any autumn or any spring of late had I been that way inclined, for I have had the cough at these periods, as you know, sir. There's a difference, Mr. Roland, between looking out for a thing, and not shutting one's eyes to what may come."

"I say, old fellow, you just put all such notions away from you." And Roland really meant to speak in a kindly spirit of cheering. "My father died of dropsy; and I may just as well set on, and poke and pat at myself every other morning, to see if it's not attacking me. Only think what would become of this office without you! Galloway would fret and fume himself into his tomb at only having me in it."

A smile crossed Jenkins's face at the idea of the office confided to the management of Roland Yorke. Poor Jenkins was one of the doubtful ones, in a sanitary point of view. Always shadowy, as if a wind would blow him away, and for some years suffering much from a cough, which only disappeared in summer, he could not and did not count upon a long life. He had entirely recovered from his accident, but the cough had now come on with much force, and he was feeling unusually weak.

"You don't look ill, Jenkins."

"Don't I, sir? The Reverend Mr. Yorke met me today——"

"Don't bring up his name before me!" interrupted Roland, raising his voice to anger. "I may begin to swear, perhaps, if you do."

"Why, what has he done?" wondered Jenkins.

"Never mind what he has done," nodded Roland. "He is a disgrace to the name of Yorke. I enjoyed the pleasure of telling him so the other night more than I have enjoyed anything a long while. He was so mad! If he had not been a parson, I shouldn't wonder but he'd have pitched into me."

"Mr. Roland, sir, you know the parties are waiting for that lease," Jenkins ventured to remind him.

"Let the parties wait," rejoined Roland. "Do they think this office is going to be hurried as if it were a common lawyer's? I say, Jenkins, where has old Galloway taken flight to this afternoon?"

"He has an appointment with the surrogate," answered Jenkins. "Oh! I quite forgot to mention something to you, Mr. Roland."

"Mention it now," said Roland.

"A person came this morning, sir, and was rather loud," said Jenkins in a tone of deprecation, as if he would apologize for having to repeat the news. "He thought you were in, Mr. Roland, and that I was only denying you, and he grew insolent. Mr. Galloway happened to be in his room, unfortunately, and heard it, and he came out himself and sent the person away. Mr. Galloway was very angry, and he desired me to tell you, sir, that he would not have that sort of people coming here."

Roland took up the ruler, and essayed to balance it on the edge of his nose. "Who was it?" asked he.

"I am not sure who it was, though I know I have seen the man somewhere. I think he wanted payment of a bill, sir."

"Nothing more likely," rejoined Roland, with characteristic indifference. "I hope his head won't ache till he gets it! I am cleared out for some time to come. I'd like to know who the fellow was, though, Jenkins, that I might punish him for his impudence. How dared he come here?"

"I asked him to leave his name, sir, and he said Mr.

Roland Yorke knew his name quite well enough without having it left for him."

"As brassy as that, was he? I wish to goodness it was the fashion to have a cistern in your house-roofs!" emphatically added Roland.

"A what, sir?" cried Jenkins, lifting his eyes from his writing.

"A water-cistern, with a movable tap, worked by a string at pleasure. You could give it a pull, you know, when such customers as these came, and they'd find themselves under a deluge. That would cool their insolence if anything would. I'd get up a company for it, and take out a patent, if I only had the ready money."

Jenkins made no reply. He was applying himself diligently to his work, perhaps hoping that Mr. Roland Yorke might take the hint and do the same. Roland actually did take it; at any rate, he dipped his pen in the ink and wrote, at the very least, five or six words, then he looked up.

"Jenkins," began he again, "do you know much about Port Natal?"

"I don't know anything about it, sir, except that there is such a place."

"Why, you know nothing!" cried Roland. "I never saw such a muff. I wonder what you reckon yourself good for, Jenkins?"

Jenkins shook his head. No matter what reproach was brought against him, he received it meekly, as if it were his due. "I am not good for much, sir, beyond just my daily duty here. To know about Port Natal and those foreign places is not in my work, sir, and so I'm afraid I neglect them. Did you want any information about Port Natal, Mr. Roland?"

"I have got it," said Roland—"loads of it. I am not sure that I shan't make a start for it, Jenkins."

"For Port Natal, sir? Why, it's all the way to Africa!"

"Do you suppose I thought it was in Wales?" retorted Roland. "It's the jolliest opening for an enterprising man is Port Natal. You may land there to-day with half a crown in your pocket, and come away in a year or two with your fortune made."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Jenkins. "How is it made, sir?"

"Oh, you learn all that when you get there. I shall *go*, Jenkins, if things don't look up a bit here."

"What things, sir?" Jenkins ventured to ask.

"Tin for one thing; work for another," answered Roland. "If I don't get more of the one and less of the other I shall try Port Natal. I had a row with my lady at dinner-time. She thinks a paltry sovereign or two ought to last a fellow for a month. My service to her! I just dropped a hint of Port Natal, and left her weeping. She'll have come to by this evening, and behave liberally."

"But about the work, sir?" said Jenkins. "I'm sure I make it as light for you as I possibly can. You have only had that lease, sir, all yesterday and to-day."

"Oh, it's not just the *amount* of work, Jenkins," acknowledged Roland; "it's the being tied by the leg to this horrid old office. As good work as play, if one has to be in it. I have been fit to cut it altogether every hour since Arthur Channing left; for you know you are no company, Jenkins."

"Very true, sir."

"If I could only get Arthur Channing to go with me, I'd be off to-morrow! But he laughs at it. He hasn't got half pluck. Only fancy, Jenkins, my coming back in a year or two with twenty thousand pounds in my pocket! Wouldn't I give you a treat, old chap! I'd pay a couple of clerks to do your work here, and carry you off somewhere, in spite of old Galloway, for a six months' holiday, where you'd get rid of that precious cough. I *would*, Jenkins."

"You are very kind, sir——"

Jenkins was stopped by the "precious cough." It seemed completely to rack his frame. Roland looked at him with sympathy, and just then steps were heard to enter the passage, and a knock came to the office door.

"Who's come bothering now?" cried Roland.—"Come in!"

Possibly the mandate was not heard, for poor Jenkins was coughing still. "Don't I tell you to come in?" roared out Roland. "Are you deaf?"

"Open the door. I don't care to soil my gloves," came back the answer from the other side. And Mr. Roland slid off his stool to obey rather less lazily than usual, for the voice was that of his mother, the Lady Augusta Yorke.

"A very dutiful son you are, Mr. Roland!" was the salutation of Lady Augusta—"forcing me up from my dinner before I had finished it!"

"I didn't do anything of the sort," said Roland.

"Yes, you did, with your threats about Port Natal! What do you know about Port Natal? Why should you go to Port Natal? You will break my heart with grief, that's what you will do."

"I was not going to start this afternoon," returned Roland. "But the fact is, mother, I shall have to go to Port Natal, or to some other port, unless I can get a little money to go on with here. A fellow can't walk about with empty pockets."

"You undutiful, extravagant boy!" exclaimed Lady Augusta. "I am worried out of my life for money between you all. Gerald got two sovereigns from me yesterday. What money do you want?"

"As much as you can let me have," replied Mr. Roland.

Lady Augusta threw a five-pound note by his side upon the desk. "When you boys have driven me into the workhouse, you'll be satisfied, perhaps. And now hold your foolish tongue about Port Natal."

Roland gathered it up with alacrity and a word of thanks. Lady Augusta had turned to Jenkins.

"You are the best off, Jenkins; you have no children to disturb your peace. You don't look well, Jenkins."

"Thank you kindly, my lady, I do feel but poorly. My cough has become so troublesome again."

"He has just been saying that he thought the cough was going to take him off," interposed Roland.

Lady Augusta laughed; she supposed it was spoken in jest, and desired her son to open the door for her. Her gloves were new and delicate.

"Had you chosen to remain at the dinner-table, as a gentleman ought, I should have told you some news, Mr. Roland," said Lady Augusta.

Roland was always ready for news. He opened his eyes and ears. "Tell it me now, good mother. Don't bear malice."

"Your uncle Carrick is coming here on a visit."

"I am glad of that; that's good!" cried Roland. "When does he come? I say, mother, don't be in a hurry! When does he come?"

But Lady Augusta apparently was in a hurry, for she did not wait to answer. Roland looked after her, and saw her shaking hands with a gentleman who was about to enter.

"Oh, he's back, is he?" cried unceremonious Roland. "I thought he was dead and buried, and gone to heaven."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NO SENIORSHIP FOR TOM CHANNING.

SHAKING hands with Lady Augusta Yorke as she turned out of Mr. Galloway's office was Mr. Huntley. He had but just arrived at Helstonleigh — had not yet been home; but he explained that he wished to give at once a word of pleasant news to Constance Channing of her father and mother, and on his way to the Boundaries was calling in on Mr. Galloway.

"You will find Miss Channing at my house," said Lady Augusta, after some warm inquiries touching Mr. and Mrs. Channing. "I would offer to go back there with you, but I am on my way to make some calls." She turned towards the town as she spoke, and Mr. Huntley entered the office.

"I thought you were never coming home again!" cried free Roland. "Why, you have been away three months, Mr. Huntley!"

"Very nearly. Where is Mr. Galloway?"

"In his skin," said Roland.

Jenkins looked up deprecatingly, as if he would apologize for the rudeness of Roland Yorke. "Mr. Galloway is out, sir. I dare say he will not be away more than half an hour."

"I can't wait now," said Mr. Huntley. "So you are one less in this office than you were when I left?"

"The awfullest shame!" struck in Roland. "Have you heard that Galloway lost a bank-note out of a letter, sir?"

"Yes. I have heard of it from Mr. Channing."

"And they accused Arthur Channing of taking it!" exclaimed Roland, emotion and anger bringing a streak of scarlet to his face. "They took him up for it; he was had up twice to the town hall like any felon. You may be slow to believe it, Mr. Huntley, but it's true."

"It was Butterby, sir," interposed Jenkins. "He was rather too officious over it, and acted without the orders of Mr. Galloway."

"Don't talk rubbish, Jenkins," rebuked Roland. "You have defended Galloway all through the piece, but he is as much to blame as Butterby. Why did he turn off Channing?"

"You do not deem him guilty, Roland, I see," said Mr. Huntley.

"I should hope I don't," answered Roland. "Butterby pitched upon Arthur because there happened to be nobody else convenient to pitch upon—just as he'd have pitched upon you, Mr. Huntley, had you happened to be in the office that afternoon."

"Mr. Arthur Channing was not guilty, I am sure, sir; pray do not think him so," resumed Jenkins, his eye lighting as he turned to Mr. Huntley. And Mr. Huntley smiled in response to the earnestness. *He* believe Arthur Channing guilty!

He left a message for Mr. Galloway, and quitted the office. Roland, who was very difficult to settle to work again if once disturbed from it, strided himself across his stool and tilted it backwards.

"I'm uncommonly glad Carrick's coming!" cried he. "Do you remember him, Jenkins?"

"Who, sir?"

"That uncle of mine. He was at Helstonleigh three years ago."

"I am not sure that I do, sir."

"What a sieve of a memory you must have! He is as tall as a house. We are not bad fellows for height, but Carrick beats us. He is not married, you know, and we look to him to square up many a corner. To do him justice, he never says "No" when he has got the cash, but he's often out at elbows himself. It was he who bought George his commission and fitted him out; and I know my lady looks to him to find the funds Gerald will want to make him a parson. I wonder what he'll do for me."

Jenkins was about to answer, but was stopped by his cough. For some minutes it completely exhausted him; and Roland, in the lack of a hearer, was fain to bring the legs of his stool down again and apply himself lazily to his work.

At this very moment, which was not much past two o'clock in the day, Bywater had got Charley Channing pinned against the palings underneath the elm trees. He had him all to himself. No other boys were within hearing, though many were within sight, for they were assembling in and round the cloisters after their dinner.

"Now, Miss Charley, it's the last time I'll ask you, as true as that we are living here! You are as obstinate as a young mule. I'll give you this one chance, and I'll not give you another. I'd advise you to lay hold upon it, if you have any regard for your skin."

"I don't know anything, Bywater."

"You shuffling little turncoat! I don't *know* that there's any fire in that kitchen chimney of the old dean's, but I am morally certain that there is, because of the clouds of black smoke that are coming out of it. And you know just as well who it was played the trick to my surplice. I don't want you to blurt it out to the school, and I won't bring your name up in it at all; I won't act upon what you tell me. There!"

"Bywater, I don't know; and suspicion goes for nothing. Gaunt said it did not."

Bywater gave Charley a petulant shake. "I say that you know morally, Miss Channing. I protest that I heard you mention the word 'surplice' to Gerald Yorke the day there was that row in the cloisters, when Roland Yorke gave Tod a thrashing and I took the seat out of my pants. Gerald Yorke looked ready to kill you for it, too! Come, out with it This is about the sixth time I have had you in trap, and you have only defied me."

"I don't defy you, Bywater. I say that I will not tell. I would not if I knew. It is no business of mine."

"You little ninny! Don't you see that your obstinacy is injuring Tom Channing? Yorke is going in for the seniorship—is sure to get it, if it's true that Pye has given the promise to Lady Augusta. But let it come out that he was the Jack-in-the-box, and his chance falls to the ground. And you won't say a word to do good to your brother!"

Charley shook his head. He did not take the bait. "And Tom himself would be the first to punish me for doing wrong! He never forgives a sneak. It's of no use your keeping me, Bywater."

"Listen, youngster. I have my suspicions—I have had them all along; and I have a clue—that's more. But for a certain reason I think my suspicions and my clue point to the wrong party, and I don't care to stir in it till I am sure. One—two—three! for the last time. Will you tell me?"

"No."

"Then, look you, Miss Charles Channing, if I do go and denounce the wrong party, and find out afterwards that it is the wrong one, I'll give you as sweet a drubbing as you ever had, and your girl's face shan't save you. Now go."

He propelled Charley from him with a jerk, and propelled him against Mr. Huntley, who was at that moment turning the corner close to them on his way from Mr. Galloway's office.

"You can't go through me, Charley," said Mr. Huntley. —"Did you think I was made of glass, Bywater?"

"My patience!" exclaimed Bywater. "Why, Harry was grumbling, not five minutes ago, that you were never coming home at all, Mr. Huntley."

"He was, was he? Is he here?"

"Oh, he's somewhere amongst the ruck of them there," cried Bywater, looking towards the distant boys. "He wants you to see about this bother of the seniorship. If somebody doesn't, we shall get up a mutiny, that's all.—Here, Huntley," he shouted at the top of his voice, "here's an arrival from foreign parts."

Some of the nearer boys looked round, and the word was passed to Huntley. Harry Huntley and the rest soon surrounded him, and Mr. Huntley had no cause to complain of the warmth of his reception. When news had recently arrived that Mr. Huntley was coming home, the boys had taken up the hope of his interference. Of course, schoolboy like, they all entered upon it eagerly.

"Stop, stop, stop!" said Mr. Huntley. "One at a time. How can I hear if you all talk together? Now, what's the grievance?"

They detailed it as rationally and with as little noise as it was in their nature to do. Huntley was the only senior present, but Gaunt came up during the conference.

"It's all a big cram, Mr. Huntley," cried Tod Yorke. "My brother Gerald says that Jenkins dreamt it."

"I'll 'dream' you if you don't keep your tongue silent, Tod Yorke," reprimanded Gaunt. "Take yourself off to a distance.—Mr. Huntley," he added, turning to that gentleman, "it is certain that Lady Augusta said it; and we can't think she'd say it unless Pye promised it. It *is* unfair upon Channing and Huntley."

A few more words given to the throng upon general matters—for Mr. Huntley touched no more on the other subject—and then he continued his way to Lady Augusta's. As he passed the house of the Reverend Mr. Pye that gentleman was coming out of it. Mr. Huntley, a decisive, straightforward man, entered upon the matter at once after some moments spent in greeting.

"You will pardon my speaking of it to you personally," he said, when he had introduced it. "In most cases I consider it perfectly unjustifiable for the friends of boys in a public school to interfere with the executive of its master; but this is different Is it or is it not correct that there is an intention afloat to exalt Yorke to the seniorship?"

"Mr. Huntley, you must be aware that in *no case* can the headmaster of a public school allow himself to be interfered with or questioned," was the reply of the master.

"I hope you will meet this amicably," returned Mr. Huntley. "I have no other wish than to be friendly. Quite so. We all deem ourselves under obligations to you, Mr. Pye, and esteem you highly. We could not have or wish a better preceptor for our sons. But in this instance my duty is plain. The injustice—if any such injustice is contemplated—tells particularly upon Tom Channing and my son. Mr. Channing does not give ear to it; I would rather not. Nevertheless, you must pardon me for acting in the uncertainty as though it had foundation. I presume you cannot be ignorant of the dissatisfied feeling that reigns in the school?"

"I have intimated that I will not be questioned," said Mr. Pye.

"Quite right. I merely wished to express a hope that there may be no foundation for the rumour. If Tom Channing and Harry forfeit their rights legally, through want of merit or ill-conduct, it is not I that would urge a word in their favour. Fair play's a jewel, and the highest boy in the school should have no better chance given him than the lowest. But if the two senior boys do not so forfeit their rights, Yorke must not be exalted above them."

"Who is to dictate to me?" demanded Mr. Pye.

"Certainly not I," replied Mr. Huntley in a courteous but firm tone. "Were the thing to take place, I should simply demand, through the dean and chapter, that the charter of the school might be consulted as to whether its tenets had been strictly followed."

The headmaster made no reply. Neither did he appear angry—only impassible. Mr. Huntley had certainly hit the right nail upon the head, for the master of Helstonleigh college school was entirely under the control of the dean and chapter.

"I can speak to you upon this all the more freely and with better understanding since it is not my boy who stands any chance," said Mr. Huntley, with a cordial smile. "Tom Channing heads him on the rolls."

"Tom Channing will not be the senior. I have no objection to affirm so much to you," observed the master, falling in with Mr. Huntley's manner. "This sad affair of his brother Arthur's debars him."

"It ought not to debar him, even were Arthur guilty," warmly returned Mr. Huntley.

"In justice to Tom Channing himself, no. But," and the master dropped his voice to a confidential tone, "it is necessary sometimes to study the prejudices taken up by a school —to see them, and not to appear to see them, if you understand me. Were Tom Channing made the school's head, part of the school would rise up in rebellion, and some of the boys would, no doubt, be removed from it. For the peace of the school alone it could not be done. The boys would not now obey him as senior, and there would be perpetual warfare, resulting we know not in what."

"Arthur Channing was not guilty. I feel as sure of it as I do of my own life."

"He is looked upon as guilty by those who must know best from their familiarity with the details," rejoined Mr. Pye. "For my own part, I have no resource but to believe him so. I regard it as one of those anomalies which you cannot understand or would believe in, but that it happens under your own eye—where the moment's yielding to temptation is at variance with the general character, with the whole past life. Of course, in these cases the disgrace is reflected upon relatives and connections, and they have to suffer for it. I cannot help the school's resenting it upon Tom."

"It will be cruel to deprive Tom of the seniorship upon these grounds," remonstrated Mr. Huntley.

"To himself individually," assented the master. "But it is well that one promoted to a foundation-school's seniorship should be free from moral taint. Were there no feeling whatever against Tom Channing in the school, I do not think I could, consistent with my duty and with a due regard to the fitness of things, place him as senior. I am sorry for the boy; I always liked him; and he has been of good report both as to scholarship and conduct."

"I know one thing," said Mr. Huntley—"that you may search the school through, and not find so good a senior as Tom Channing would make."

"He would have made a very good one, there's no doubt—would have ruled the boys well and firmly, though without oppression. Yes, we lose a good senior in Tom Channing."

There was no more to be said. Mr. Huntley felt that the master was thoroughly decided; and for the other matter, touching Yorke's, he had done with it until the time of appointment. As he went musing on, he began to think that Mr. Pye might be right with regard to depriving Tom of the seniorship, however unjust it might appear to Tom himself. Mr. Huntley remembered that not one of the boys, except Gaunt, had mentioned Tom Channing's name in his recent encounter with them; they had spoken of the injustice of exalting Yorke over *Harry Huntley*. He had not much noticed it at the time.

He proceeded to Lady Augusta's, and Constance was informed of his visit. She had three pupils at Lady Augusta's now, for that lady had kindly insisted that Constance should bring Annabel to study with her daughters during the absence of Mrs. Channing. Constance left them to themselves and entered the drawing-room—pretty Constance, so fresh, so lovely, in her simple dress of muslin, and her smoothly-braided hair. Mr. Huntley caught her hands, and imprinted a very fatherly kiss upon her fair forehead.

"That is from the absentees, Constance. I told them I should give it to you. And I bring you the bravest news, my dear. Mr. Channing was already finding benefit; he was, indeed. There is every hope that he will be restored."

Constance was radiant with delight. To see one who had met and stayed with her father and mother at their far-off place of sojourn was almost like seeing them.

"And now, my dear, I want a word with you about all those untoward trials and troubles which appear to have come thickly during my absence," continued Mr. Huntley. "First of all, as to yourself. What mischief-making wind has been arising between you and William Yorke?"

The expression of Constance's face changed to sadness, and her cheeks grew crimson.

"My dear, you will not misunderstand me," he resumed. "I heard of these things at Borcette, and I said that I should undertake to inquire into them in the place of your father—just as he, health permitting him, would have undertaken for me in my absence, did any trouble arise to Ellen. Is it true that you and Mr. Yorke have parted?"

"Yes," faltered Constance.

"And the cause?"

Constance strove to suppress her tears. "You can do nothing, Mr. Huntley, nothing whatever. Thank you all the same."

"He has made this accusation upon Arthur the plea for breaking his engagement?"

"I could not marry him with this cloud upon me," she murmured. "It would not be right."

"Cloud upon *you!*" hastily ejaculated Mr. Huntley. "The accusation of Arthur was the sole cause, then, of your parting?"

"Yes, the sole cause which led to it."

Mr. Huntley paused, apparently in thought. "He is presented to Hazeldon Chapel, I hear. Did his rupture with you take place *after* that occurrence?"

"I see what you are thinking," she impulsively cried, caring too much for Mr. Yorke not to defend him. "The chief fault of the parting was mine. I felt that it would not do to become his wife, being—being"—she hesitated much—"Arthur's sister. I believe that he also felt it. Indeed, Mr. Huntley, there is no help for it; nothing can be done."

"Knowing what I do of William Yorke, I am sure that the pain of separation must be keen, whatever may be his pride. Constance, unless I am mistaken, it is equally keen to you."

Again rose the soft damask blush in the face of Constance. But she answered decisively, "Mr. Huntley, I pray you to allow the subject to cease. Nothing can bring about a renewal of the engagement between myself and Mr. Yorke. It is irrevocably at an end."

"Until Arthur shall be cleared, you mean?"

"No," she answered, a vision of Hamish and *his* guilt flashing across her; "I mean for good."

"Why does not Arthur assert his innocence to Mr. Yorke? Constance, I am sure you know, as well as I do, that he is not guilty. *Has* he asserted it?"

A rush of glowing crimson now. The questions were becoming close. She made no answer.

"As I would have wished to serve you, so will I serve Arthur," said Mr. Huntley. "I told your father and mother, Constance, that I should make it my business to investigate the charge against him; I shall leave not a stone unturned to bring his innocence to light."

The avowal threw Constance into a panic, and she lost her self-possession. "Oh, don't! don't!" she uttered. "You must not, indeed! You do not know the mischief it might do."

"Mischief to what? to whom?" exclaimed Mr. Huntley.

Constance buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. The next moment she had raised it and taken Mr. Huntley's hand between hers. "You are papa's friend; you would do us good and not harm. Is it not so?" she beseechingly said.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, quite confounded by her words, her distress, "you know that I would not harm any of you for the world."

"Then, *pray*, do not seek to dive into that unhappy story," she implored. "It must not be too closely looked into."

And Mr. Huntley quitted Constance like a man who walks upon his head, so entirely amazed was he. What could be the puzzle?

As he was going through the cloisters—his nearest way to the town—Roland Yorke came flying up. With his usual scant ceremony, he passed his arm within Mr. Huntley's. "Galloway's come in now," he exclaimed, "and I am off to the bank to pay in a bag of money for him. Jenkins told him you had called. Just hark at that clatter!"

The clatter alluded to by Mr. Roland was occasioned by the tramp of the choristers on the cloister-flags. They were coming up behind, full speed, on their way from the schoolroom to enter the cathedral, for the bell had begun for service.

"And here comes that beautiful relative of mine," continued Roland, as he and Mr. Huntley passed the college entrance and turned to the west gate of the cloisters. "Would you credit it, Mr. Huntley, that he has turned out a sneak? He has. He was to have married Constance Channing, you know; and for fear Arthur should have touched the note, he has declared off it. If I were Constance, I would never allow the fellow to speak to me again."

Apparently it was the course Mr. Roland himself intended to observe. As the Reverend Mr. Yorke, who was coming in to service, drew near, Roland strode on, his step haughty, his head in the air, which was all the notice he vouchsafed to take. Probably the minor canon did not care very much for Mr. Roland's notice, one way or the other; but his eye lighted with pleasure at the sight of Mr. Huntley, and he advanced to him, his hand outstretched.

But Mr. Huntley—a man given to show in his manner his likes and dislikes—would not see the hand, would not stop at all, but passed Mr. Yorke with a distant bow. That gentleman had fallen pretty deep in his estimation since he heard of the rupture with Constance Channing. Mr. Yorke stood for a moment as if petrified, and then strode on his way with a step as haughty as Roland's.

Roland burst into a glow of delight. "That's the way to serve him, Mr. Huntley! I hope he'll get cut by every man in Helstonleigh."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GERALD YORKE MADE INTO A "BLOCK."

THE Reverend Mr. Yorke, in his surplice and hood, stood in his stall in the cathedral. His countenance was stern, absorbed, like that of a man who is not altogether at peace with himself. Let us hope that he was absorbed in the sacred service in which he was taking a part; but we all know, to our cost, that the spirit will wander at these times, that worldly thoughts obtrude themselves The very greatest divine that the Church boasts is not always free from them.

Not an official part in the service was Mr. Yorke taking that afternoon: the duty was being performed by the head-master, whose week it was to take it. Very few people indeed were at service, and still less of the clergy. The dean was present, but not one of the chapter.

Arthur Channing sat in his place at the organ. Arthur's thoughts, too, were wandering, and—you know it is of no use to make people out to be better than they are — wandering to things especially mundane. Arthur had not ceased to look out for something to do to replace the weekly funds lost when he left Mr. Galloway's. He had not yet been successful. Employment is more easily sought than found, especially by one lying under doubt, as he was.

But he had now heard of something which he hoped he might gain.

Jenkins, saying nothing to Roland Yorke or to anybody else, had hurried to Mr. Channing's house that day between one and two o'clock, and the hurrying there and back had probably caused that temporary increase of cough which you heard of a chapter or two back. Jenkins's errand was to inform Arthur that Dove and Dove (solicitors in the town, who were by no means so dovelike as their name) required a temporary clerk, and he thought Arthur might suit. Arthur had asked Jenkins to keep a lookout for him.

"Is one of their clerks leaving?" Arthur inquired.

"One of them met with an accident last night up at the railway station," replied Jenkins. "Did you not hear of it, sir?"

"I heard of that. I did not know who it was that was hurt. He was trying to cross the line, was he not?"

"Yes, sir. It was Marston. He had been out with some friends, and had taken, it is thought, more than was good for him. A porter pulled him back, but Marston fell, and the engine crushed his foot. He will be laid up two months, the doctors say, and Dove and Dove are looking out for somebody to fill his place for the time. If you would like to take it, sir, you could be looking out for something else while you are there. You would more readily get the two hours' daily leave of absence from a place like that, where they keep three or four clerks, than you would from where they keep but one."

"If I like to take it!" repeated Arthur. "Will they like to take me? That's the question. Thank you, Jenkins, I'll see about it at once."

He was not able to do so immediately that Jenkins left, for Dove and Dove's offices were situated at the other end of the town, and he might not be back in time for service. So he waited and went first to college, and sat, I say, in his place at the organ, his thoughts filled, in spite of himself, with the new project.

The service came to an end. It had seemed long to Arthur—so prone are we to estimate time by our own feelings—and his voluntary afterwards was played a shade faster than usual. Then he quitted the cathedral by the front entrance, and hastened to the office of Dove and Dove.

Arthur had had many a rebuff of late when bent on a similar application, and his experience taught him that it was best, if possible, to see the principals—not to subject himself to the careless indifference or to the insolence of a clerk. Two young men were writing at a desk when he entered. "Can I see Mr Dove ?" he inquired.

The elder of the writers scrutinized him through the railings of the desk. "Which of them ?" asked he.

"Either," replied Arthur—"Mr. Dove, or Mr. Alfred Dove. It does not matter"

"Mr. Dove's out, and Mr. Alfred Dove's not at home," was the response. "You'll have to wait or to call again."

He preferred to wait, and in a very few minutes Mr. Dove came in. Arthur was taken into a small room, so full of papers that it seemed difficult to turn in it, and there he stated his business.

"You are a son of Mr. Channing's, I believe," said Mr. Dove. He spoke morosely, coarsely ; and he had a morose and coarse countenance, the sure index of the mind, in him as in others. "Was it you who figured in the proceedings at the Guildhall some few weeks back ?"

You may judge whether the remark called the blood to Arthur's face. He suppressed his mortification and spoke bravely.

"It was myself, sir. I was not guilty. My employment in your office would be the copying of deeds solely, I presume, which would afford me little temptation to be dishonest, even were I inclined to be."

Had anybody paid Arthur in gold to keep in that little bit of sarcasm, he could not have helped speaking it. Mr. Dove caught up the idea that the words *were* uttered in sarcasm, and scowled fitfully.

"Marston was worth twenty-five shillings a week to us, and gained it. You would not be worth half as much."

"You do not know what I should be worth, sir, unless you tried me. I am a quick and correct copyist ; but I should not look to receive so much as an ordinary clerk, on account of having to attend the cathedral for morning and afternoon service. Wherever I go, I must have that privilege allowed me."

"Then I don't think you'll get it with us. But look here, young Channing, it is my brother who undertakes the engaging and the management of the clerks ; you can speak to him."

"Can I see him this afternoon, sir ?"

"He'll be in presently. Of course, we could not admit you into our office without some one becoming security. You must be aware of that."

The words seemed like a checkmate to Arthur, and he stopped in hesitation. "Is it usual, sir?"

"Usual? No! But it is necessary in *your* case."

There was a coarse, pointed stress upon the "your" natural to the man. Arthur turned away. For a moment he felt that to Dove and Dove's he could not and would not go; every feeling within him rebelled against it. Presently the rebellion calmed down, and he began to think about the security.

It would be of little use, he was sure, to apply to Mr. Alfred Dove—who was a shade coarser than Mr. Dove, if anything—unless prepared to say that security could be furnished. His father's he thought he might command; but he was not sure of that under present circumstances without first speaking to Hamish. He turned his steps to Guild Street, his unhappy position pressing with unusual weight upon his feelings.

"Can I see my brother?" he inquired of the clerks in the office.

"He has some gentlemen with him just now, sir. I dare say you can go in."

There was nothing much amiss in the words, but in the tone there was. It was indicative of slight, of contempt. It was the first time Arthur had been there since the suspicion had fallen on him, and they seemed to stare at him as if he had been a wild hyena, not a respectable hyena either.

He entered Hamish's room. Hamish was talking with two gentlemen, strangers to Arthur, but they were on the point of leaving. Arthur stood away against the wainscoting by the corner table, waiting till they were gone, his attitude, his countenance, his whole appearance indicative of depression and sadness.

Hamish closed the door and turned to him. He laid his hand kindly upon his shoulder; his voice was expressive of the kindest sympathy. "So you have found your way here once more, Arthur! I thought you were never coming again. What can I do for you, lad?"

"I have been to Dove and Dove's. They are in want of a clerk. I think perhaps they would take me; but, Hamish, they want security."

"Dove and Dove's," repeated Hamish. "Nice gentlemen, both of them!" he added in his half-pleasant, half-sarcastic manner. "Arthur, boy, I'd not be under Dove and Dove if they offered me a gold nugget a day as weighty as the Queen's crown. You must not go there."

"They are not agreeable men; I know that. They are not men who are liked in Helstonleigh. But what difference will that make to me? So long as I turn out their parchments properly engrossed, that is all I need care for."

"What has happened? Why are you looking so sad?" reiterated Hamish, who could not fail to perceive that there was some strange grief at work.

"Is my life so sunny just now that I can always be as bright as you?" retorted Arthur; for Hamish's undimmed gaiety did sometimes jar upon his wearied spirit. "I shall go to Dove and Dove's if they will take me," he added resolutely. "Will you answer for me, Hamish, in my father's name?"

"What amount of security do they require?" asked Hamish. And it was a very proper, a very natural question; but even that grated on the nerves of Arthur.

"Are you afraid of me?" he rejoined. "Or do you fear my father would be?"

"I dare say they would take my security," was the reply of Hamish. "I will answer for you to any amount. That is," and again came his gleesome smile, "to any amount they may deem me good for. If they don't like mine, I can offer my father's. Will that do, Arthur?"

"Thank you; that is all I want."

"Don't go to Dove and Dove's, old boy," Hamish said again, as Arthur was leaving the room. "Wait patiently for something more desirable to turn up. There's no such great hurry. I wish there was room for you to come here!"

"It is but a temporary thing; it is not for long," replied Arthur; and he went out.

On going back to Dove and Dove's, the first person he saw upon opening the door of the clerks' room was Mr. Alfred Dove. He appeared to be in a passion over something that had gone wrong, and was talking fast and furiously.

"What do you want?" he asked, wheeling round upon Arthur. Arthur replied by intimating that he would be glad to speak with him.

"Can't you speak, then?" returned Mr. Alfred Dove. "I am not deaf."

Thus met, Arthur did not repeat his wish for privacy.

He intimated his business, uncertain whether Mr. Alfred Dove had heard of it or not, and stated that the security could be given.

"I don't know what you mean about 'security,'" was Mr. Alfred Dove's rejoinder. "What security?"

"Mr. Dove said that if I came into your office security would be required," answered Arthur. "My friends are ready to give it."

"Mr. Dove told you that, did he? Just like him. He has nothing to do with the details of the office. Did he know who you are?"

"Certainly he did, sir."

"I should have thought not," offensively returned Mr. Alfred Dove. "You must possess some assurance, young man, to come after a place in a respectable office. Security or no security, we can't admit one into ours who lies under the accusation of being light-fingered."

It was the man all over. Hamish had said, "Don't go to Dove and Dove's." Mr. Alfred Dove stood with his finger pointing to the door, and the two clerks stared in an insolent manner at Arthur. With a burning brow and rising spirit Arthur left the room, and halted for a moment in the passage outside. "Patience, patience!" he murmured to himself—"patience, and trust in God!" He turned into the street quickly, and ran right against Mr. Huntley.

For a minute he could not speak. That gentleman detected his emotion, and waited till it was over. "Have you been insulted, Arthur?" he breathed.

"Not much more so than I am now getting accustomed to be," was the answer that came from his quivering lips. "I heard they wanted a clerk and went to offer myself. I am looked upon as a felon now, Mr. Huntley."

"Being innocent as the day."

"I am innocent before God," spoke Arthur in the impulse of his emotion, in the fervency of his heart. That he spoke but the solemn truth it was impossible to doubt, even had Mr. Huntley been inclined to doubt; and Arthur may be excused for forgetting his usual caution in the moment's bitterness.

"Arthur," said Mr. Huntley, "I promised your father and mother that I should do all in my power to establish your innocence. Can you tell me how I am to set about it?"

"You cannot do it at all, Mr. Huntley. Things must remain as they are."

"Why?"

"I cannot explain why. I can only repeat it."

"There is some strange mystery attaching to this."

Arthur did not gainsay it.

"Arthur, if I am to let the affair rest as I find it, you must at least give me a reason why I may not act. What is it?"

"Because the investigation could only cause tenfold deeper trouble. You are very good to think of helping me, Mr. Huntley, but I must fight my own battle. Others must be quiet in this matter—for all our sakes."

Mr. Huntley gazed after Arthur as he moved away. Constance first! Arthur next! What could be the meaning of it all? Where did the mystery lie? A resolution grew up in Mr. Huntley's heart that he would fathom it, for private reasons of his own; and in the impulse of the moment, he bent his steps, there and then, towards the police station, and demanded an interview with Roland Yorke's *bête noire*, Mr. Butterby.

But the cathedral is not quite done with for the afternoon. Upon the conclusion of service the dean lingered a few minutes in the nave, speaking to one of the vergers. When he turned to continue his way he encountered the Reverend Mr. Pye, who had been taking off his surplice in the vestry. The choristers had been taking off their surplices also, and were now gone trooping through the cloisters back to the schoolroom, not more gently than usual. The dean saluted Mr. Pye, and they walked out together.

"It is impossible to keep them quiet unless one's eye is continually upon them!" exclaimed the headmaster, half apologetically, as they came in view of the rebels.

"Boys will be boys," said the dean. "How has this foolish opinion arisen among them that the names standing first on the roll for seniorship will not be allowed to compete for it?" continued he, with much suavity.

Mr. Pye looked rather flushed. "Really I am unable to say, Mr. Dean. It is difficult to account for all the notions taken up by schoolboys."

"Boys do take up strange notions," blandly assented the dean. "But I think, were I you, Mr. Pye, I would set their minds at rest in this respect. You have not yet deemed it worth while, I dare say; but it may perhaps be as well to do so. When the elders of a school once pick up the idea that their studies may not meet their due reward, it tends to render them indifferent. I remember once —it was just after I came here as dean, many years ago— the headmaster of the school exalted a boy to be senior who stood sixth or seventh on the rolls, and was positively half an idiot. But those times are past."

"Certainly they are," remarked the master.

"It was an unpleasant duty I had to perform then," continued the dean in the same agreeable tone, as if he were relating an anecdote — "unpleasant both for the parents of the boy and for the headmaster. But, as I remark, such things could not occur now. I think I would intimate to the king's scholars that they have nothing to fear."

"It shall be done, Mr. Dean," was the response of the master, and they exchanged bows as the dean turned into the deanery. "She's three parts a fool is that Lady Augusta," muttered the master to the cloister-flags as he strode over them. "Chattering magpie!"

As circumstances had it, the way was paved for the master to speak at once. Upon entering the college schoolroom and passing the senior desk, he overheard whispered words of dispute between Gerald Yorke and Pierce senior touching this very question, the seniorship. The master reached his own desk, gave it a sharp rap with a cane that lay near to hand, and spoke in his highest tone, looking red and angry.

"What *are* these disputes that appear to have been latterly disturbing the peace of the school? What is that you are saying, Gerald Yorke?—that the seniorship is to be yours?"

Gerald Yorke looked red in his turn and somewhat foolish. "I beg your pardon, sir; I was not saying precisely that," he answered, with hesitation.

"I think you were saying precisely that," was the response of the master. "My ears are quicker than you may fancy, Master Yorke. If you really have been hugging yourself with the notion that the promotion will be yours, the sooner you disabuse your mind of it the better. Whoever gains the seniorship will gain it by priority of right, by scholarship, or by conduct, as the matter may be. Certainly not by anything else. Allow me to recommend you, one and all"—and the master threw his eyes round the desks generally, and gave another emphatic stroke with the cane—"that you concern yourselves with your legitimate business, not with mine."

Gerald did not like the reproof or the news. He remained silent and sullen until the conclusion of school, and then went tearing home.

"A pretty block you have made of me!" he uttered, bursting into the presence of Lady Augusta, who had just returned home very warm, and sat fanning herself on a sofa before an open window.

"Why, what has taken you?" returned her ladyship.

"It's a shame, mother, it is, filling me up with the news that I was to be senior! And now Pye goes and announces that I'm a fool for supposing so, and that it's to go in the regular rotation."

"Pye does not mean it," said my lady. "There, hold your tongue, Gerald. I am too hot to talk."

"I know that every fellow in the school will have the laugh at me if I am to be made a regular block of like this!" grumbled Gerald.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EARL OF CARRICK.

On a fine afternoon in August—and the month was now drawing towards its close—the 2.25 train from London steamed into the station at Helstonleigh, eight minutes behind time, and came to a standstill. Amongst the passengers who alighted was a gentleman of middle age, as it is called—in point of fact, he had entered his fiftieth year, as the peerage would have told any curious inquirer. As he stepped out of the first-class carriage several eyes were drawn towards him, for he was of notable height, towering above everybody—even above Roland Yorke, who was of good height himself, and stood on the platform waiting for him.

It was the Earl of Carrick, brother to Lady Augusta Yorke, and much resembling her—a pleasant-natured, high cheek-boned, easy face, betraying more of affable good-humour than of high or keen intellect, and nothing of pride. The pride of the young Yorkes was sometimes talked of in Helstonleigh, but it came off their father's side, not from Lady Augusta's. The earl spoke with a slight tincture of brogue, and shook both the hands of Roland heartily, as soon as he found that it was to Roland they belonged.

"Sure, then, but I didn't know ye, Roland! If ye had twenty years more on to yer head, I should have thought it was yer father."

"Have I grown like him, Uncle Carrick?"

"Ye've grown out of knowledge, me boy. And how's yer mother, and how are the rest of ye?"

"Stunning," responded Roland. "They are all outside. She would bring the whole caravan up. The last time the lot came to the station the two young ones got upon the line to dance a hornpipe on the rails; so she has kept them by her, and is making Gerald and Tod look after them. Where's your luggage, Uncle Carrick? Have you brought a servant?"

"Not I," replied the earl. "Servants are only troubles in other folk's houses, and me bit of luggage isn't much but I can look after it meself. I hope they put it in," he continued, looking about amid the boxes and portmanteaus, and unable to see his own.

The luggage was found at last and given in charge to a porter, and Lord Carrick went out to meet his relatives. There were enough of them to meet—the whole caravan, as Roland had expressed it. Lady Augusta sat in her barouche, her two daughters and Constance and Annabel Channing with her. Little Percy and Frank, two most troublesome children, were darting in and out amid the waiting carriages, flies, and omnibuses; and Gerald and Tod had enough to do to keep them out of danger. It was so like Lady Augusta—the bringing them all to the station to welcome their uncle! Warm-hearted and impulsive, she had little more judgment than a child. Constance had in vain protested against herself and Annabel being pressed into the company, but her ladyship looked upon it as a sort of triumphal expedition, and was deaf to remonstrances.

The earl, warm-hearted and impulsive also, kissed them all, Constance included. She could not help herself; before she was aware of the honour intended her, the kiss was given—a hearty smack, like all the rest had. The well-meaning, simple-minded Irishman could not have been made to understand why he should not give a kiss of greeting to Constance as readily as he gave it to his sister or his sister's daughters. He protested that he remembered Constance and Annabel well. It may be questioned whether there was not more of Irish politeness than of truth in the assertion, though he had seen them occasionally during his visit of three years before.

How were they all to get home? In and on the barouche, as all, save Roland, had come, to the gratification of the curious town? Lord Carrick wished to walk — his long legs were cramped; but Lady Augusta would not hear of it, and pulled him into the carriage. Gerald, Percy, and Frank were fighting for places on the box beside the driver, Tod intending to hang on behind, as he had done in coming, when the deep-toned college bell struck out the quarter to three, and the sound came distinctly to their ears, borne from the distance. It put a stop to the competition, so far as Gerald was concerned. He and Tod, startled half out of their senses, for they had not observed the lapse of time, set off back on foot as hard as they could go.

Meanwhile Roland, putting aside the two young ones with his strong hand, chose to mount the box himself, at which they both began to shriek and roar. Matters were compromised after a while: Percy was taken up by Roland, and Frank was, by some process of packing, stowed away inside. Then the cargo started, Lady Augusta happy as a princess with her newly-met brother and her unruly children, and not caring in the least for the gaze of the people who stood in the street, or came rushing to their windows and doors to criticise the load.

Crowded as the carriage was, it was pleasanter to be in it on that genial day than to be at work in close rooms, dark shops, or dull offices. Amongst others who were so confined and hard at work was Jenkins at Mr. Galloway's. Poor Jenkins had not improved in health during the week or two that have elapsed since you last saw him. His cough was more troublesome still, and he was thinner and weaker. But Jenkins, humble and conscientious, thinking himself one who was not worth thinking of at all in comparison with others, would have died at his post rather than give in. Certainly Arthur Channing had been discharged at the most inopportune time, for Mr. Galloway, as steward to the dean and chapter, had more to do about Michaelmas than at any other period of the year. From that epoch until November, when the yearly audit took place, there was a good deal of business to get through.

On this afternoon Jenkins was particularly busy. Mr. Galloway was away from home for a day or two, on business connected with that scapegrace cousin of his, Roland Yorke proclaimed—though whether Mr. Roland had any foundation for the assertion save his own fancy may be doubted—and Jenkins had it all upon his own shoulders. Jenkins, unobtrusive and meek though he was, was perfectly competent to manage, and Mr. Galloway left him with entire trust. But it is one thing to be competent to manage, and another thing to be able to do two persons' work in one person's time ; and that Jenkins was finding this afternoon. He had letters to write ; he had callers to answer ; he had the general business of the office to attend to ; and there were, besides, deeds to prepare and copy. The copying of these deeds was the work pertaining to Roland Yorke. Roland did not seem to be in a hurry to come to them. Jenkins cast towards them an anxious eye, but Jenkins could do no more, for his own work could not be neglected. He felt very unwell that afternoon—oppressed, hot, unable to breathe. He wiped the moisture from his brow three or four times, and then he thought he might be the better for a little air, and opened the window. But the breeze, gentle as it was, made him cough, and he shut it again.

Of course nobody knowing Mr. Roland Yorke could be surprised at his starting to the station to meet Lord Carrick instead of to the office to do his work. He had gone home at one o'clock that day as usual. Not that there was any necessity for his doing so, for the dinner hour was postponed until later, and it would have furthered the business of the office had he remained for once at his post. Had anybody suggested to Roland to do so, he would have thought he was going to be worked to death. About twenty minutes past three he came clattering in.

"I say, Jenkins, I want holiday this afternoon."

Jenkins, albeit the most accommodating spirit in the world, looked dubious, and cast a glance at the papers on Roland's desk. "Yes, sir. But what is to be done about the Uphill farm leases ?"

"Now, Jenkins, it's not a bit of good for you to begin to croak ! If I gave in to you, you'd get as bad as Galloway. When I have got my mind off work, I can't settle to it again, and it's of no use to try. Those Uphill deeds are not wanted before to-morrow."

"But they are wanted by eleven o'clock, sir, so that they must be finished, or nearly finished, to-night. You know, sir, there has been a fuss about them and to-morrow, early, is the very latest time they must be sent in."

"I'll get up and be here in good time and finish them," said Roland. "Just put it to yourself, Jenkins, if you had an uncle that you'd not seen for seventeen ages, whether you'd like to leave him the minute he puts his foot over the door-sill ?"

"I dare say I should not, sir," said good-natured Jenkins, turning about in his mind how he could make time to do Roland's work. "His lordship is come then, Mr. Roland ?"

"His lordship's come, bag and baggage," returned Roland. "I say, Jenkins, what a thousand shames it is that he's not rich ! He is the best-natured fellow alive, and would do anything in the world for us if he only had the tin."

"Is he not rich, sir ?"

"Why, of course he's not," confidentially returned Roland. "Everybody knows the embarrassments of Lord Carrick. When he came into the estates, they had been mortgaged three deep by the last peer, my grandfather—an old guy in a velvet skull-cap, I remember, who took snuff incessantly—and my uncle, on his part, had mortgaged them three deep again, which made six. How Carrick manages to live nobody knows. Sometimes he's in Ireland, in the tumble-down old homestead, with just a couple of servants to wait upon him ; and sometimes he's on the Continent, *en garçon*—if you know what that means. Now and then he gets a windfall when any of his tenants can be brought to pay up ; but he is the easiest-going coach in life, and won't press them. Wouldn't I ?"

"Some of those Irish tenants are very poor, sir, as I have heard."

"Poor be hanged ! What is a man's own ought to be his own. Carrick says there are some years that he does not draw two thousand pounds, all told."

"Indeed, sir ! That is not much for a peer."

"It's not much for a commoner, let alone a peer," said Roland, growing fierce. "If I were no better off than Carrick, I'd drop the title ; that's what I'd do. Why, if he could live as a peer ought, do you suppose we should be in the position that we are—one a soldier ; one (and that's me) lowered to be a common old proctor ; one a parson ; and all the rest of it ? If Carrick could be as other earls are, and have interest with the Government, and that, we should stand a chance of getting properly provided for. Of course, he can make interest with nobody while his estates bring him in next door to nothing."

"Are there no means of improving his estates, Mr. Roland?" asked Jenkins.

"If there were, he's not the one to do it. And I don't know that it would do him any material good after all," acknowledged Roland. "If he gets one thousand a year, he spends two; and if he had twenty thousand, he'd spend forty. It might come to the same in the long run, so far as he goes; *we* might be the better for it, and should be. It's a shame, though, that we should need to be the better for other folk's money; if this were not the most unjust world going, everybody would have fortunes of their own."

After this friendly little bit of confidence touching his uncle's affairs, Roland prepared to depart. "I'll be sure to come in good time in the morning, Jenkins, and set to it like a brick," was his parting salutation.

Away he went. Jenkins, with his poor aching head and his harassing cough, applied himself diligently, as he ever did, to the afternoon's work, and got through it by six o'clock, which was later than usual. There then remained the copying which Mr. Roland Yorke ought to have done. Knowing the value of Roland's promises, and knowing also that if he kept this promise ever so strictly, the amount of copying was more than could be completed in time, if left to the morning, Jenkins did as he had been aware he must do when talking with Roland—took it home with him.

The parchments under his arm, he set out on his walk. What could be the matter with him that he felt so weak? he asked himself as he went along. It must be, he believed, the having gone without his dinner. Jenkins generally went home to dinner at twelve and returned at one; occasionally, however, he did not go till two, according to the exigencies of the office. This day he had not gone at all, but had cut a sandwich at breakfast-time and brought it with him in his pocket.

He had proceeded as far as the elm trees in the Boundaries—for Jenkins generally chose the quiet cloister way for his road home—when he saw Arthur Channing advancing towards him. With the ever-ready, respectful, cordial smile with which he was wont to greet Arthur whenever he saw him, Jenkins quickened his steps. But suddenly the smile seemed to fix itself upon his lips, and the parchments fell from his arm, and he staggered against the palings. But that Arthur was at hand to support him, he might have fallen to the ground.

"Why, what is it, Jenkins?" asked Arthur kindly, when Jenkins was beginning to recover himself.

"Thank you, sir; I don't know what it could have been. Just as I was looking at you, a mist seemed to come before my eyes, and I felt giddy. I suppose it was a sort of faintness that came over me. I had been thinking that I felt weary. Thank you very much, sir."

"Take my arm, Jenkins," said Arthur, as he picked up the parchments and took possession of them. "I'll see you home."

"Oh no, sir, indeed," protested simple-hearted Jenkins; "I'd not think of such a thing. I'd feel quite ashamed, sir, at the thought of your being seen arm-in-arm with me in the street. I can go quite well alone; I can, indeed, sir."

Arthur burst out laughing. "I wish you wouldn't be such an old duff, Jenkins — as the college boys have it. Do you suppose I should let you go home by yourself? Come along."

Drawing Jenkins's arm within his own, Arthur turned with him. Jenkins really did not like it. Sensitive to a degree was he, and to his humble mind it seemed that Arthur was out of place walking familiarly with him.

"You must have been doing something to tire yourself," said Arthur, as they went along.

"It has been a pretty busy day, sir, now Mr. Galloway's away. I did not go home to dinner for one thing."

"And Mr. Roland Yorke absent for another, I suppose?"

"Only this afternoon, sir. His uncle, Lord Carrick, has arrived. O sir!" broke off Jenkins, stopping in a panic, "here's his lordship the bishop coming along. Whatever shall you do?"

"Do!" returned Arthur, scarcely understanding him. "What should I do?"

"To think that he should see you thus with the like of me!"

It amused Arthur exceedingly. Poor, lowly-minded Jenkins! The bishop appeared to divine the state of the case, for he stopped when he came up. Possibly he was struck by the wan hue which overspread Jenkins's face.

"You look ill, Jenkins," he said, nodding to Arthur Channing. "Keep your hat on, Jenkins, keep your hat on."

"Thank you, my lord," replied Jenkins, disregarding the injunction touching his hat. "A sort of faintness came over me just now under the elm trees, and this gentleman insisted upon walking home with me, in spite of my protestations to——"

Jenkins was stopped by a fit of coughing—a long, violent fit, sounding hollow as the grave. The bishop watched him till it was over. Arthur watched him.

"I think you should take better care of yourself, Jenkins," remarked his lordship. "Is any physician attending you?"

"Oh, my lord, I am not poorly enough yet for that. My wife made me go to Mr. Hurst the other day, my lord, and he gave me a bottle of something. But he said it was not medicine that I wanted."

"I would advise you to go to a physician, Jenkins. A stitch in time saves nine, you know," the bishop added in his free good-humour.

"So it does, my lord. Thank your lordship for thinking of me," added Jenkins, as the bishop said good-afternoon and pursued his way. And then, and not till then, did Jenkins put on his hat again.

"Mr. Arthur, would you be so kind as not to say anything to my wife about my being poorly?" asked Jenkins, as they drew near to his home. "She'd be, perhaps, for saying I should not go again yet to the office; and a pretty dilemma that would put me in, Mr. Galloway being absent. She'd get so fidgety, too; she kills me with kindness if she thinks I am ill. The broth, and arrowroot, and other messes, sir, that she makes me swallow are untellable."

"All right," said Arthur.

But the intention was frustrated. Who should be standing at the shop-door but Mrs. Jenkins herself! She saw them before they saw her, and she saw that her husband looked like a ghost, and was supported by Arthur. Of course she drew her own conclusions; and Mrs. Jenkins was one who did not allow her conclusions to be put down. When Jenkins found that he was seen and suspected, he held out no longer, but honestly confessed the worst—that he had been taken with a giddiness.

"Of course," said Mrs. Jenkins, as she pushed a chair here and another there, partly in temper, partly to free the narrow passage through the shop to the parlour. "I have been expecting nothing less all day. Every group of footsteps slower than usual I have thought it was a shutter arriving and you on it, dropped dead from exhaustion.

Would you believe"—turning short round on Arthur Channing—"that he has been such a donkey as to fast from breakfast-time? And with that cough upon him!"

"Not quite so fast, my dear," deprecated Jenkins. "I ate the paper of sandwiches."

"Paper of rubbish!" retorted Mrs. Jenkins. "What good do sandwiches do a weakly man? You might eat a ton-load and be none the better for it. Well, Jenkins, you may take your leave of having your own way."

Poor Jenkins might have deferentially intimated that he never did have it. Mrs. Jenkins resumed,—

"He said he'd carry a sandwich with him this morning instead of coming home to dinner. I said, 'No.' And afterwards I was such a simpleton as to yield! And here's the effects of it!—Sit yourself down in the easy-chair," she added, taking Jenkins by the two arms and pushing him into it. "And I'll make the tea now," concluded she, turning to the table where the tea-things were set out. "There's some broiled fowl coming up for you."

"I don't feel as if I could eat this evening," Jenkins ventured to say.

"*Not eat?*" she repeated, with emphasis. "You had better eat—that's all. I don't want to have you falling down exhausted here as you did in the Boundaries."

"And as soon as you have had your tea you should go to bed," put in Arthur.

"I can't, sir. I have got three or four hours' work at that deed. It must be done."

"At this?" returned Arthur, opening the papers he had carried home. "Oh, I see; it is a lease. I'll copy this for you, Jenkins. I have nothing to do to-night. You take your ease and go to bed."

And in spite of their calls, Jenkins's protestations against taking up his time and trouble, and Mrs. Jenkins's proffered invitation to partake of tea and broiled fowl, Arthur departed, carrying off the work.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ELLEN HUNTLEY.

"A PRETTY time o' day this is to deliver the letters! It's eleven o'clock!"

"I can't help it. The train broke down, and was three hours behind its time."

"I dare say! You letter-men want looking up; that's what it is. Coming to folks's houses at eleven o'clock, when they have been a-waiting and looking ever since breakfast-time!"

"It's not my fault, I say. Take the letter."

Judith received it with a grunt, for it was between her and the postman that the colloquy took place. A delay had occurred that morning in the delivery, and Judith was resenting it, feeling half inclined to reject the letter, now that it had come. The letters from Germany arrived irregularly—sometimes by the afternoon post at four, sometimes by the morning, the only two deliveries in Helstonleigh. A letter had been fully expected this morning, and when the time passed over they supposed there was none.

It was directed to Miss Channing. Judith, who was quite as anxious about her master's health as the children were, went off at once with it to Lady Augusta Yorke's, just as she was, without the ceremony of putting on a bonnet. Though she did wear a mobcap and a check apron, she looked what she was—a respectable servant in a respectable family; and the Boundaries regarded her as such as she passed through them, the letter in her hand. Martha, Lady Augusta's housemaid, answered the door, presenting a contrast to Judith. Martha wore a crinoline as big as her lady's, and a starched-out muslin gown over it, with flounces and frillings, for Martha was "dressed" for the day. Her arms, red and large, were displayed beneath her open sleeves, and something that looked like a bit of twisted lace was stuck on the back of her head. Martha called it her "cap." Judith was a plain servant, and Martha was a fashionable one; but I know which looked the best.

Judith would not give in the letter. She asked for the young mistress, and Constance came to her in the hall. "Just open it, please, Miss Constance, and tell me how he is," said she anxiously; and Constance broke the seal of the letter.

"Borcette. Hotel Rosenbad. *September.*

"My dear Child,—Still better and better! The improvement, which I told you in my last week's letter had begun to take place so rapidly as to make us fear it was but a deceitful one, turns out to have been real. Will you believe it when I tell you that your papa can *walk?* He can, Constance. With the help of my arm he can walk across the room and along the passage, and to-morrow he is going to try at getting down the first flight of stairs. None but God can know how thankful I am — not even my children. If this change has taken place in the first month (and it is not yet quite that), what may we not expect in the next, and the next? Your papa is writing to Hamish, and will confirm what I say."

This much Constance read aloud. Judith gave a glad laugh. "It's just as everybody told the master," said she. "A fine, strong, handsome man like him wasn't likely to be laid down for life like a babby when he was hardly mid-aged. These doctors here be just so many muffs. When I get too old for work I'll go to Germany myself, Miss Constance, and ask 'em to make me young again."

Constance smiled. She was running her eyes over the rest of the letter, which was a long one. She caught sight of Arthur's name. There were some loving, gentle messages to him, and then these words: "Hamish says Arthur applied at Dove and Dove's for a clerk's place, but did not come to terms with them. We are pleased that he did not. Papa says he should not like to have one of his boys at Dove and Dove's."

"And here's a little bit for you, Judith," Constance said aloud. "Tell Judith not to be over-anxious in her place of trust, and not to overwork herself, but to let Sarah take her full share. There is no hurry about the bed-furniture; Sarah can do it in an evening at her leisure."

Judith received the latter portion of the message with scorn. "'Tisn't me that's going to *let* her do it! A fine do it would be, Miss Constance! The first thing I shall see when I go back now will be her head stretched out at one of the windows, and the kidney beans left in the kitchen to string and cut themselves!"

Judith turned to depart. She never would allow any virtues to her helpmate Sarah, who gave about the same trouble to her that young servants of twenty do give to old ones. Constance followed her to the door, saying something which had suddenly occurred to her mind about domestic affairs, when whom should she meet coming in but the Reverend William Yorke! He had just left the cathedral after morning prayers, and was calling in at Lady Augusta's.

Both were confused; both stopped, face to face, in hesitation. Constance grew crimson, Mr. Yorke pale. It was the first time they had met since the parting. There was an angry feeling against Constance in the mind of Mr. Yorke; he considered that she had not treated him with proper confidence, and in his proud nature — the Yorke blood was his—he was content to resent it. He did not look to *lose* Constance eventually; he expected that the present storm would blow over some time, and that things would come right again. We are all too much given to trust to that vague "some time." In Constance's mind there existed a soreness against Mr. Yorke. He had doubted her; he had accepted (if he had not provoked) too readily her resignation of him. Unlike him, she saw no prospect of the future setting matters to rights: marry him whilst the cloud lay upon Arthur she would not, after what he had intimated of his opinion and sentiments; and that cloud could only be lifted at the expense of another.

They exchanged a confused greeting, neither conscious how it passed. Mr. Yorke's attention was then caught by the open letter in her hand—by the envelope bearing the foreign post-marks. "How is Mr. Channing?" he asked.

"So much better that it seems little short of a miracle," replied Constance. "Mamma says," glancing at the letter, "that he can walk, leaning on her arm."

"I am so glad to hear it! Hamish told me last week that he was improving. I trust it may go on to a cure."

"Thank you," replied Constance. And she made him a pretty little curtsy of state as she turned away, not choosing to see the hand he would fain have offered her.

Mr. Yorke's voice brought a head and shoulders out at the breakfast-room door. They belonged to Lord Carrick. He and Lady Augusta were positively at breakfast at that hour of the day. His lordship's eyes followed the light, pretty form of Constance as she disappeared up the staircase on her return to the schoolroom. William Yorke's were cast in the same direction. Then their eyes—the peer's and the clergyman's—met.

"Ye have given her up, I understand, Master William?"

"Master William" vouchsafed no reply. He deemed it a little piece of needless impertinence.

"Bad taste!" continued Lord Carrick. "If I were but twenty years younger, and she'd not turn up her nose at me for a big daft of an Irishman, *you'd* not get her, me lad. She's the sweetest little thing I have come across this many a day."

To which the Reverend William Yorke condescended no answer, unless a haughty gesture expressive of indignation might be called one, as he brushed past Lord Carrick into the breakfast-room.

At that very hour, and in a breakfast-room also—though all signs of the meal had long been removed—were Mr. Huntley and his daughter. The same epithet of praise just bestowed by Lord Carrick upon Constance Channing might with equal justice be given to Ellen Huntley. She was a lovely girl, three or four years older than Harry, with pretty features and soft dark eyes. What's more, she was a good girl—a noble, generous-hearted, good girl, although (you know, nobody is perfection) with a spice of self-will. For the latter quality I think Ellen was more indebted to circumstances than to Nature. Mrs. Huntley was dead, and a maiden sister of Mr. Huntley's, older than himself, resided with them and ruled Ellen — ruled her with an over-tight hand, not a kind one, not a judicious one, and that had brought out Miss Ellen's self-will. Miss Huntley was very starched and prim and stiff—very unnatural, in short—and she wished to make Ellen the same. Ellen rebelled, for she much disliked everything artificial. She was truthful, honest, straightforward — not unlike the character of Tom Channing. Miss Huntley complained that she was too straightforward to be ladylike; Ellen said she was sure she should never be otherwise than straightforward, so it was of no use trying to be. Then Miss Huntley would take offence, and threaten Ellen with "altering her will," and that would vex Ellen more than anything. Young ladies rarely care for money, especially when they have plenty of it; and Ellen Huntley would have that from her father. "As if I cared for my aunt's money!" she would say. "I wish she may not leave it to me." And she was sincere in the wish. Their controversies frequently amused Mr. Huntley. Agreeing in heart and mind with his daughter, he would yet make a playful show of taking his sister's part. Miss Huntley knew it to be show—done to laugh at her—and would grow as angry with him as she was with Ellen.

Mr. Huntley was not laughing, however, on this morning.

On the contrary, he appeared to be in a very serious, not to say solemn mood. He slowly paced the room, as was his custom when anything disturbed him, stopping at moments to reflect, buried in thought. Ellen sat at a table by the window, drawing. The house was Mr. Huntley's own—a white villa, with a sloping lawn in front. It was situated outside the town, on a gentle eminence, and commanded a view of the charming scenery for which the county was famous.

Ellen, who had glanced up two or three times, concerned to see the very stern, perplexed look on her father's face, at length spoke. "Is anything the matter, papa?"

Mr. Huntley did not answer. He was standing close to the table then, apparently looking at Ellen, at her white morning dress and its blue ribbons—it and she altogether a fair picture. Probably he saw neither her nor her dress—he was too deeply absorbed.

"You are not ill, are you, papa?"

"Ill!" he answered, rousing himself. "No, Ellen, I am not ill."

"Then you have had something to vex you, papa?"

"I have," emphatically replied Mr. Huntley. "And the worst is, that my vexation will not be confined to myself, I believe. It may extend to you, Ellen."

Mr. Huntley's manner was so serious, his look so peculiar as he gazed upon her, that Ellen felt a rush of discomfort, and the colour spread itself over her fair face. She jumped to the conclusion that she had been giving offence—that Miss Huntley must have been complaining of her.

"Has my aunt been telling you about last night, papa? Harry had two of the college boys here, and I unfortunately laughed and talked with them, and she said afterwards I had done it on purpose to annoy her. But I assure you, papa——"

"Never mind assuring me, child," interrupted Mr. Huntley. "Your aunt has said nothing to me; and if she had, it would go in at one ear and out at the other. It is worse business than any complaint that she could bring."

Ellen laid down her pencil and gazed at her father, awe-struck at his strange tone. "What is it?" she breathed.

But Mr. Huntley did not answer. He remained perfectly still for a few moments, absorbed in thought; and then, without a word of any sort to Ellen, turned short round to leave the room, took his hat as he passed through the hall, and left the house.

Can you guess what it was that was troubling Mr. Huntley? Very probably, if you can put, as the saying runs, that and that together.

Convinced as he was that Arthur Channing was not, could not, be guilty of taking the bank-note, yet puzzled by the strangely tame manner in which he met the charge, confounded by the behaviour both of Arthur and Constance relating to it, Mr. Huntley had resolved, if possible, to dive into the mystery. He had his reasons for it. A very disagreeable, a very improbable suspicion, called forth by the facts, had darted across his mind, *therefore* he resolved to penetrate to it. And he set to work. He questioned Mr. Galloway, he questioned Butterby, he questioned Jenkins, and he questioned Roland Yorke. He thus became as thoroughly conversant with the details of the transaction as it was possible for any one, save the actual thief, to be; and he drew his own deductions. Very reluctantly, very slowly, very cautiously were they drawn, but very surely. The behaviour of Arthur and Constance could only have one meaning—that they were screening the real culprit. And that culprit must be Hamish Channing.

Unwilling as Mr. Huntley was to admit it, he had no other resource. He grew as certain of it as he was of his own life. He had loved and respected Hamish in no measured degree. He had observed the attachment springing up between him and his daughter, and he had been content to observe it. None were so worthy of her, in Mr. Huntley's eyes, as Hamish Channing, in all respects save one—wealth; and of that Ellen would have plenty. Mr. Huntley had known of the trifling debts that were troubling Hamish, and he found that those debts, immediately on the loss of the bank-note, had been partially satisfied. That the stolen money must have been thus applied, and that it had been taken for that purpose, he could not doubt.

Hamish! It nearly made Mr. Huntley's hair stand on end. That he must be silent over it, as were Hamish's own family, he knew—silent for Mr. Channing's sake. And what about Ellen?

There was the sad, very sad grievance. Whether Hamish went wrong or whether Hamish went right, it was not of so much consequence to Mr. Huntley; but it might be to Ellen—in fact, he thought it would be. He had risen that morning resolved to hint to Ellen that any particular intimacy with Hamish must cease. But he was strangely indecisive over it: now that the moment was come he almost doubted, himself, Hamish's guilt. All the improbabilities of the case rose up before him in marked colours; he lost sight of the condemning facts; and it suddenly occurred to him that it was scarcely fair to judge Hamish so completely without speaking to him. "Perhaps he can account to me for the possession of the money which he applied to those debts," thought Mr. Huntley. "If so, in spite of appearances, I will not deem him guilty."

He went out on the spur of the moment, straight down to the office in Guild Street. Hamish was alone, not at all busy apparently. He was standing up by the fireplace, his elbow on the mantelpiece, a letter from Mr. Channing (no doubt the one alluded to in Mrs. Channing's letter to Constance) in his hand. He received Mr. Huntley with his cordial, sunny smile; spoke of the good news the letter brought; spoke of the accident which had caused the delay of the mail; and finally read out part of the letter, like Constance had to Judith.

It was all very well; but this only tended to embarrass Mr. Huntley. He did not like his task, and the more confidential they got over Mr. Channing's health the worse it made it for him to enter upon. As chance had it, Hamish himself paved the way. He began telling of an incident which had taken place that morning, to the scandal of the town. A young man, wealthy but improvident, had been arrested for debt. Mr. Huntley had not yet heard of it.

"It stopped his day's pleasure," laughed Hamish. "He was going along with his gun and dogs, intending to pop at the partridges, when he got popped upon himself instead. Poor fellow! it was too bad to spoil his sport. Had I been a rich man, I should have felt inclined to bail him out."

"The effect of running in debt," remarked Mr. Huntley. "By the way, Master Hamish, is there no fear of a like catastrophe for you?" he added in a tone which Hamish might, if he liked, take for a jesting one.

"For me, sir?" returned Hamish.

"When I left Helstonleigh in June, a certain young friend of mine was not quite free from a suspicion of such liabilities," rejoined Mr. Huntley.

Hamish flushed rosy red. Of all people in the world, Mr.

Huntley was the one from whom he would, if possible, have kept that knowledge, but he spoke up readily.

"I did owe a thing or two, it can't be denied," acknowledged he. "Men better and wiser and richer than I have owed money before me, Mr. Huntley."

"Suppose they serve you as they have served Jenner this morning?"

"They will not do that," laughed Hamish, seeming very much inclined to make a joke of the matter. "I have squared up some sufficiently to be on the safe side of danger, and I shall square up the rest."

Mr. Huntley fixed his eyes upon him. "How did you get the money to do it, Hamish?"

Perhaps it was the plain, unvarnished manner in which the question was put; perhaps it was the intent gaze with which Mr. Huntley regarded him; but certain it is that the flush on Hamish's face deepened to a glowing crimson, and he turned it from Mr. Huntley, saying nothing.

"Hamish, I have a reason for wishing to know."

"To know what, sir?" asked Hamish, as if he would temporize or stave off the question.

"Where did you get the money that you applied to liquidate, or partially to liquidate, your debts?"

"I cannot satisfy you, sir. The affair concerns no one but myself. I did get it, and that is sufficient."

Hamish had come out of his laughing tone, and spoke as firmly as Mr. Huntley; but that the question had embarrassed him was palpably evident. Mr. Huntley said good-morning, and quitted the office without shaking hands. All his doubts were confirmed.

He went straight home. Ellen was where he had left her, still alone. Mr. Huntley approached her and spoke abruptly. "Are you willing to give up all intimacy with Hamish Channing?"

She gazed at him in surprise, her complexion changing, her voice faltering. "O papa! what have they done?"

"Ellen, did I say 'they'? The Channings are my dear friends, and I hope ever to call them such. They have done nothing unworthy of my friendship or of yours. I said Hamish."

Ellen rose from her seat, unable to subdue her emotion, and stood with her hands clasped before Mr. Huntley. Hamish was far dearer to her than the world knew.

"I will leave it to your good sense, my dear," Mr. Huntley whispered, glancing round, as if not caring that even the walls should hear. "I have liked Hamish very much, or you may be sure he would not have been allowed to come here so frequently. But he has forfeited my regard now, as he must forfeit that of all good men."

She trembled excessively, almost to impede the words, when she would have asked what it was that he had done.

"I scarcely dare breathe it to you," said Mr. Huntley, "for it is a thing that we must hush up, like the family are hushing it up. When that bank-note was lost suspicion fell on Arthur."

"Well, papa?" wonderingly resumed Ellen.

"It was not Arthur who took it. It was Hamish. And Arthur is bearing the stigma of it for his father's sake."

Ellen grew pale. "Papa, who says it?"

"No one *says* it, Ellen. But the facts leave no room to doubt. Hamish's own manner—I have just left him—leaves no room for it. He is indisputably guilty."

Then Ellen's anger, her *straightforwardness*, broke forth. She clasped her hands in pain, and her face grew crimson. "He is *not* guilty, papa. I would answer for it with my own life. How dare they accuse him? How dare they asperse him? Is he not Hamish Channing?"

"Ellen! *Ellen!*"

Ellen burst into a passionate flood of tears. "Forgive me, papa. If he has no one else to take his part, I will do it. I do not wish to be undutiful; and if you bid me never to see or speak to Hamish Channing again, I will implicitly obey you; but hear him spoken of as guilty, I will not. I wish I could stand up for him against the world."

"After that, Miss Ellen Huntley, I think you had better sit down."

Ellen sat down, and cried until she was calm.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

NOTHING of sufficient consequence to record here occurred for some weeks to the Channing family, or to those connected with them. October came in, and in a few days would be decided the uncertain question of the seniorship.

Gaunt would leave the college on the fifth, and on the sixth the new senior would be appointed. The headmaster had given no intimation whatever to the school as to which of the three seniors would obtain the promotion, and discussion ran high upon the probabilities. Some opined it would be Huntley; some, Gerald Yorke; a very few, Tom Channing. Countenanced by Gaunt and Huntley as he had been throughout, Tom bore on his way amid much cabal; but for the circumstance of the senior boy espousing (though not very markedly) his cause, his place would have been unbearable. Hamish attended to his customary duties in Guild Street, and sat up at night as usual in his bedroom, as the light of his candle testified to Judith's eyes. Arthur tried bravely for a situation, and tried in vain; he could get nothing given to him—nobody seemed willing to take him on. There was nothing for it but to wait in hopeful patience. He took the organ daily, and copied at home the cathedral music. Constance was finding great favour with the Earl of Carrick—but you will hear more about that presently. Jenkins grew more like a shadow day by day. Roland Yorke went on in his impulsive, scapegrace fashion. Mr. and Mrs. Channing sent home news, hopeful and more hopeful, from Germany. And Charley, unlucky Charley, had managed to get into hot water with the college school.

Thus uneventfully had passed the month of September. October was now in, and the sixth rapidly approaching. What with the uncertainty prevailing, the preparation for the examination which on that day would take place, and a little private matter upon which some few were entering, the college school had just then a busy and exciting time of it.

Stephen Bywater sat in one of the niches of the cloisters, a pile of books by his side. Around him, in various attitudes, were gathered seven of the most troublesome of the tribe—Pierce senior, George Brittle, Tod Yorke, Fred Berkeley, Bill Simms, Mark Galloway, and Hurst, who had now left the choir but not the school. They were hatching mischief. Twilight overhung the cloisters; the autumn evenings were growing long, and this was a gloomy one. Half an hour at the very least had the boys been gathered there since afternoon school, holding a council of war in covert tones.

"Paid out he shall be, by hook or by crook," continued Stephen Bywater, who appeared to be president, if talking more than his *confrères* constitutes one. "The worst is, how is it to be done? One can't wallop him."

"Not wallop him!" repeated Pierce senior, who was a bad-dispositioned boy as well as a mischievous one. "Why not, pray?"

"Not to any good," said Bywater. "*I* can't, with that delicate face of his. It's like beating a girl."

"That's true," assented Hurst. "No, it won't do to go in for beating; might break his bones or something. I can't think what's the good of those delicate ones putting themselves into a school of this sort. A parson's is the place for them — eight gentlemanly pupils, treated as a private family, with a mild usher, and a lady to teach the piano."

The council burst into a laugh at Hurst's mocking tones, and Pierce senior interrupted it.

"I don't see why he shouldn't——"

"Say she, Pierce," corrected Mark Galloway.

"She, then. I don't see why she shouldn't get a beating if she deserves it; it will teach her not to try her tricks on again. Let her be delicate; she'll feel it the more."

"It's all bosh about his being delicate. She's not," vehemently interrupted Tod Yorke, somewhat perplexed, in his hurry, with the personal pronouns. "Charley Channing's no more delicate than we are. It's all in the look. As good say that detestable little villain Boulter is delicate because he has got yellow curls. I vote for the beating."

"I'll vote you out of the business if you show insubordination, Master Tod," cried Bywater. "We'll pay out Miss Charley in some way, but it shan't be by beating him."

"Couldn't we lock him up in the cloisters, like we locked up Ketch and that lot, and leave him there all night?" proposed Berkeley.

"But there'd be the getting the keys?" debated Mark Galloway.

"As if we couldn't get the keys if we wanted to get them!" scoffingly retorted Bywater. "We did old Ketch the other time, and we could do him again. *That* would not serve the young one out, the locking him up in the cloisters."

"Wouldn't it, though!" said Tod Yorke. "He'd be dead of fright before morning, he's so mortally afraid of ghosts."

"Afraid of what?" cried Bywater.

"Of ghosts. He's a regular coward about them. He dare not go to bed in the dark for fear of their coming to him.

He'd rather have five-and-twenty pages of Virgil to do than he'd be left alone after nightfall "

The notion so tickled Bywater that he laughed till he was hoarse. Bywater could not understand the being afraid of "ghosts." Had Bywater met a whole army of ghosts, the encounter would only have afforded him pleasure.

"There never was a ghost seen yet as long as anybody can remember," cried he, when he came out of his laughter. "I'd sooner believe in Gulliver's travels than I'd believe in ghosts. What a donkey you are, Tod Yorke!"

"It's Charley Channing that's the donkey, not me," cried Tod fiercely. "I tell you, if we locked him up here for a night, we should find him dead in the morning when we came to let him out. Let's do it."

"What! to find him dead in the morning!" exclaimed Hurst. "You are a nice one, Tod!"

"Oh, well, I don't mean altogether dead, you know," acknowledged Tod. "But he'd have had a mortal night of it—all his clothes gummed together from fright, I'll lay."

"I don't think it would do," deliberated Bywater. "A whole night—twelve hours, that would be—and in a fright all the time, if he *is* frightened. Look here! I have heard of folks losing their wits through a thing of the sort."

"I won't go in for anything of that," said Hurst. "Charley's not a bad lot, and he shan't be harmed. A bit of a fright, or a bit of a whacking, not too much of either—that'll be the thing for Miss Channing."

"Tod Yorke, who told you he was afraid of ghosts?" demanded Bywater.

"Oh, I know it," said Tod. "Annabel Channing was telling my sisters about it, for one thing; but I knew it before. We had a servant once who told us so: she had lived at the Channings'. Some nurse frightened him when he was a youngster, and they have never been able to get the fear out of him since."

"What a precious soft youngster he must have been!" said Master Bywater.

"She had used to get a ghost and dress it up and show it off to Miss Charley——"

"Get a ghost, Tod!"

"Bother! You know what I mean," said Tod testily. "Get a broom or something of that sort, and dress it up with a mask and wings; and he is as scared over it now as he ever was. I don't care what you say."

"Look here!" exclaimed Bywater, starting from his niche as a bright idea occurred to him. "Let one of us personate a ghost and appear to him! That would be glorious! It would give him a precious good fright for the time, and no harm done."

If the boys had suddenly found the philosopher's stone, it could scarcely have afforded them so much pleasure as did this idea. It was received with subdued shouts of approbation: the only murmur of dissent to be heard was from Pierce senior. Pierce grumbled that it would not be "half serving him out."

"Yes, it will," said Bywater. "Pierce senior shall be the ghost: he tops us all by a head."

"Hurst is as tall as Pierce senior."

"That he's not," interrupted Pierce senior, who was considerably mollified at the prospective honour being awarded to him. "Hurst is not much above the tips of my ears. Besides, Hurst is fat, and you never saw a fat ghost yet."

"Have you seen many ghosts, Pierce?" mocked Bywater.

"A few—in pictures. Wretched old scarecrows they always are, with a cadaverous face and lantern jaws."

"That's the reason you'll do so well, Pierce," said Bywater. "You are as thin as a French herring, you know, with a yard and a half length of throat."

Pierce received the doubtful compliment flatteringly, absorbed in the fine vista of mischief opening to him. "How shall I get myself up, Bywater?" asked he complaisantly. "With horns and a tail?"

"Horns and a tail be bothered!" returned Hurst. "It must be like a real ghost—all white and ghastly."

"Of course it must," acquiesced Bywater.

"I know a boy in our village that they served out like that," interposed Bill Simms, who was a country lad, and boarded in Helstonleigh. "They got a great big turnip, and scooped it out, and made it into a man's face, and put a light inside, and stuck it on a post where he had to pass at night. He was so frightened that he died."

"Cram!" ejaculated Tod Yorke.

"He did, though," repeated Simms. "They knew him before for an awful little coward, and they did it to have some fun out of him. He didn't say anything at the time —didn't scream, or anything of that; but after he got home he was taken ill, and the next day he died. My father was one of the jury on the inquest. He was a little chap with no father or mother—a ploughboy."

"The best thing, if you want to make a ghost," said Tod Yorke, "is to get a tin plate full of salt and gin, and set it alight, and wrap yourself round with a sheet, and hold the plate so that the flame lights up your face. You never saw anything so ghastly. Scooped-out turnips are all bosh!"

"I could bring a sheet off my bed," said Bywater. "Thrown over my arm, they'd think at home I was bringing out my surplice. And if——"

A wheezing and coughing and clanking of keys interrupted the proceedings. It was Mr. Ketch coming to lock up the cloisters. As the boys had no mind to be fastened in themselves, they gathered up their books and waited in silence till the porter was close upon them. Then, with a sudden war-whoop, they sprang past him, very nearly startling the old man out of his senses, and calling forth from him a burst of hard words.

The above conversation, puerile and schoolboyish as it may seem, was destined to lead to results all too important; otherwise it would not have been related here. You very likely may have discovered ere this that this story of the Helstonleigh college boys is not merely a work of imagination, but taken from facts of real life. Had you been in the cloisters that night with the boys—and you might have been—and heard Master William Simms, who was the son of a wealthy farmer, tell the tale of a boy's being frightened to death, you would have known it to be a true one, if you possessed any knowledge of the annals of the vicinity. In like manner the project they were getting up to frighten Charles Channing, and Charles's unfortunate propensity *to be* frightened, are strictly true.

Master Tod Yorke's account of what had imbued his mind with this fear was a tolerably correct one. Charley was somewhat troublesome as a young child, fractious, and the wicked nurse girl who attended upon him (I can call her nothing else) had used to dress up frightful figures to terrify him into quietness. She might not have been able to accomplish this without detection, but that Mrs. Channing was at that time debarred from active superintendence of her household. When Charley was about two years old she fell into ill-health, and for eighteen months was almost entirely confined to her room. Judith was much engaged with her mistress and with household matters, and the baby, as Charley was still called, was chiefly left to the mercies of the nurse. Not content with frightening him practically, she instilled into his young imagination the most pernicious stories of ghosts, dreams, and such like absurdities. But foolish as *we* know them to be, they are not the less horrible to a child's vivid imagination. At two, or three, or four years old it is eagerly opening to impressions; and things solemnly related by a mother or a nurse become impressed upon it almost as with gospel truth. Let the fears once be excited in this terrible way, and not a whole lifetime can finally eradicate the evil. I would rather a nurse broke one of my children's limbs than thus poisoned its fair young mind.

In process of time the girl's work was discovered—discovered by Judith. But the mischief was done. You may wonder that Mrs. Channing should not have been the first to discover it, or that it could have escaped her notice at all, having the child with her often for his early religious instruction; but one of the worst phases of this state of things is the shrinking tenacity with which the victim buries the fears within his own breast. He dare not tell his parents; he is taught not, and taught by fear. It may not have been your misfortune to meet with a case of this kind; I hope you never will. Mrs. Channing would observe that the child would often shudder as with terror, and cling to her in an unaccountable manner; but having no suspicion of the evil, she attributed it to a sensitive, timid temperament. "What is it, my little Charley?" she would say. But Charley would only bury his face all the closer, and keep silence. When Martha—that was the girl's name (not the same Martha who was now living at Lady Augusta's)—came for him, he would go with her willingly, cordially. It was not her he feared. On the contrary, he was attached to her—she had taught him to be—and he looked upon her as a protector from those awful ghosts and goblins.

Well, the thing was in time discovered, but the mischief, I say, was done. It could not be eradicated. Charles Channing's judgment and good sense told him that all those bygone terrors were but tricks of that wretched Martha's. But overcome the fear he could not. All consideration was shown to him. He was never scolded for it, never ridiculed; his brothers and sisters observed to him entire silence upon the subject—even Annabel; and Mr. and Mrs. Channing had done reasoning lovingly with him now. It is not argument that will avail in a case like this. In the broad light of day Charley could be very brave—would laugh at such tales with the best of them; but when the dark night came, and he was left alone—if he ever was left alone—then all the old terror rose up again, and his frame would shake, and his skin break out into drops, and he would throw himself on the bed or the floor and hide his face, afraid of the darkness and of what he might see in it. He was as utterly unable to prevent or subdue this fear as he was to prevent his own breathing. He knew it in the sunny morning light to be a foolish fear, entirely without reason; but in the lonely night there it came again, and he could not combat it.

Thus it is easy to understand that the very worst subject for a ghost trick to be played upon was Charles Channing. It was, however, going to be done. The defect—for it really is a defect—had never transpired to the college school, who would not have spared their ridicule or spared Charley. Reared in that point under happier auspices, they could have given nothing but utter ridicule to the fear. Chattering Annabel, in her thoughtless communications to Caroline and Fanny Yorke, had not bargained for their reaching the ears of Tod; and Tod, when the report did reach his ears, remembered to have heard the tale before; until then it had escaped his memory.

Charley had got into hot water with some of the boys. Bywater had been owing him a grudge for weeks on account of Charley's persistent silence touching what he had seen the day the surplice was inked; and now there arose another grudge on Bywater's score, and also on that of others. There is not space to enter into the particulars of the affair; it is sufficient to say that some underhand work, touching cribs, came to the knowledge of one of the under-masters, and came to him through Charley Channing.

Not that Charley went open-mouthed and told; there was nothing of that disreputable character—which the school held in especial dislike—the sneak, about Charles Channing; Charley would have bitten his tongue out first. By an unfortunate accident Charles was pinned by the master and questioned, and he had no resource but to speak out. In honour, in truth, he could not do otherwise; but the consequence was punishment to the boys, and they turned bitter against him. Schoolboys are not famous for being swayed by the rules of strict justice; and they forgot to remember that in Charles Channing's place they would (at any rate, most of them) have felt bound to do the same. They visited the accident upon him, and were determined—as you have heard them express it in their own phrase—to "serve him out."

Leaving this decision to fructify, let us turn to Constance. Lady Augusta Yorke—good-hearted in the main, liberal-natured, swayed by every impulse like the wind—had been particularly kind to Constance and Annabel Channing during the absence of their mother. Evening after evening she would insist upon their spending at her house, Hamish—one of Lady Augusta's lasting favourites, probably from his good looks—being pressed into the visit with them by my lady. Hamish was nothing loath. He had given up indiscriminate evening visiting; and since the coolness which had arisen in the manner of Mr. Huntley, Hamish did not choose to go much to Mr. Huntley's, where he had been a pretty constant visitor before, and he found his evenings hang somewhat heavily on his hands. Thus Constance saw a good deal of the Earl of Carrick, or it may be more to the purpose to say the earl saw a good deal of her.

For the earl grew to like her very much indeed. He grew to think that if she would only consent to become his wife, he should be the happiest man in ould Ireland; and one day, impulsive in his actions as was ever Lady Augusta, he told Constance so in that lady's presence.

Constance—much as we may regret to hear it of her—behaved in by no means a dignified manner. She laughed over it. When brought to understand, which she was some little time doing, that she was actually paid that high compliment, she laughed in the earl's face. He was as old as her father, and Constance had certainly regarded him much more in the light of a father than a husband.

"I do beg your pardon, Lord Carrick," she said apologetically, "but I think you must be laughing at me."

"Laughing at ye!" said the earl. "It's not I that would do that. I'd like ye to be Countess of Carrick to-morrow, my dear, if ye can only get over me fifty years and me gray hair. Here's me sister—she knows that I'd like to have ye. It's you that are laughing at me, Miss Constance—at me ould locks."

"No, indeed, indeed it is not at that," said Constance, while Lady Augusta sat with an impassive countenance. "I don't know why I laughed. It so took me by surprise; that was why, I think. Please do not say any more about it, Lord Carrick."

"Ye could not like me as well as ye like William Yorke? Is that it, child?"

Constance grew crimson. Like him as she liked William Yorke!

"Ye're the nicest girl I have seen since Kathleen Blake," resumed the straightforward, simple earl. "She promised to have me—she said she liked me gray hair better than brown, and me fifty years better than thirty—but while I was putting the place a bit in order for her, she went and married a young Englishman.—Did ye ever see him, Augusta?" turning to his sister. "He is a baronet; he came somewhere from these parts."

Lady Augusta intimated stiffly that she had not the honour of the baronet's acquaintance. She thought her brother was making a simpleton of himself, and had a great mind to tell him so.

"And since Kathleen Blake went over to the enemy, I have not seen anybody that I'd care to look twice at till I came here and saw you, Miss Constance," resumed the earl. "And if ye can only get to overlook the natural impediments on me side, and not mind me being poor, I'd be delighted, me dear, if ye'd say the word."

"You are very kind, very generous, Lord Carrick," said Constance in an impulse of feeling; "but I can only beg you never to ask me such a thing again."

"Ah, well, child, I see ye're in earnest," good-naturedly responded the earl, as he gave it up. "I was afraid ye'd only laugh at me. I knew I was too old."

And that was the beginning and the ending of Lord Carrick's wooing. Scarcely worth recording, you will think. But there was a reason for doing so.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DECISION.

THE important sixth of October—important to the Helstonleigh college boys—did not rise very genially. On the contrary, it rose rather sloppily. A soaking rain was steadily descending, and the streets presented a continuous scene of puddles. The boys dashed through it umbrellaless (I never saw one of them carry an umbrella in my life, and don't believe the phenomenon ever was seen), their clean surplices on their arms, on their way to attend ten o'clock morning prayers in the cathedral. The day was a holiday from school, but not from morning service. The college bell was beginning to ring out as they entered the schoolroom. Standing in the senior's place and calling over the roll was Tom Channing, the acting senior for a few brief hours. Since Gaunt's departure the previous day Tom Channing had been the school's head ; it lay in the custom of the school for him so to be. Would his place be confirmed, or would he lose it ? Tom looked quite flurried with the suspense. It was not so much the being appointed senior that he thought of, as the disgrace, the humiliation, that would be his portion were he deposed from it. He knew that he deserved the place, that it was his by right ; he stood first on the rolls, and he had done nothing whatever to forfeit it. He was the school's best scholar ; and if he was not a perfect model for conduct always, there was this much to be said in his favour—that none of them could boast of being better. The opinion of the school had been veering round for the last few days in favour of Tom. I do not mean that he personally was in better odour with it—not at all (the snowball touching Arthur had gathered in strength in the rolling)—but in favour of his chances of the seniorship. Not a breath of intimation had the headmaster given, save that one day, in complaining to Gaunt of the neglect of a point of discipline in the school, which point was entirely under the control of the senior boy, he had turned to Tom and said, "Remember, Channing, it must be observed for the future." Tom's heart leaped within him as he heard it, and the boys looked inquiringly at the master. But the master had then got his head buried in the deep drawer of his desk hunting for a lost paper. Unless he had spoken it in forgetful abstraction—which was not improbable—there could be no doubt that he looked upon Tom as Gaunt's successor. The school so interpreted it, and chose to become, amongst themselves, sullenly rebellious. As to Tom, who was nearly as sanguine in temperament as Hamish, his hopes and his spirits went up to fever heat.

One of the last to tear through the streets, splashing his jacket behind up to the collar and splashing his surplice, was Harry Huntley. He, like all the rest, took care to be in time that morning. There would have been no necessity for his racing, however, had he not lingered at home talking. He was running down from his room, whither he had gone again after breakfast to give the finishing brush to his hair (I can tell you that some of those college gentlemen were dandies, using a pot and a half of bear's-grease a week), when Mr. Huntley's voice was heard calling him into the breakfast-room.

"Harry," said he, "I don't think that I need enjoin you not to suffer your manner to show triumph towards Tom Channing should you be promoted over him to-day."

"I shan't be, papa. Channing will have the seniorship."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, from something Pye let drop. We look upon it that Channing is as good as senior."

Mr. Huntley remembered the tenor of the private conversation the master had held with him, and believed his son would find himself mistaken, and that he, Harry, would be made senior. That it would be Gerald Yorke, Mr. Huntley did not believe. "At any rate, Harry, take heed to what I say," he resumed. "Be entirely considerate and courteous towards your friend Channing if you should get it. Do not let me have to blush for my son's ill-feeling."

There was a tone in Mr. Huntley's voice which, to Harry's ears, seemed to intimate that he did not speak without reason. "Papa, it would not be fair for me to go up over Channing," he impulsively said.

"No. Comparing your merits together, Channing is the better man of the two."

Harry laughed. "He is not worse, at all events. Why are you saying this, papa?"

"Because I fancy that you are more likely to be the successful one than Tom Channing. I wish I may be mistaken. I would rather he had it; for, personally, he has done nothing to forfeit it."

"If Harry could accept the seniorship and displace Tom Channing, I would not care to call him my brother again," interrupted Ellen Huntley, with a flashing eye.

"It is not that, Ellen; you girls don't understand things," retorted Harry. "If Pye displaces Tom from the seniorship, he does not do it to exalt me; he does it because he won't have him at any price. Were I to turn round like a chivalrous Knight Templar and say I'd not take it, out of regard to my friend Tom, where would be the good? Yorke would get hoisted over me, and I should be laughed at for a duff.—But I'll do as you like, papa," he added, turning to Mr. Huntley. "If you wish me not to take the honour, I'll resign it in favour of Yorke. I never looked for it to be mine, so it will be no disappointment; I always thought we should have Channing."

"Your refusing it would do no good to Channing," said Mr. Huntley. "And I should have grumbled at you, Harry, had you suffered Yorke to slip over your head. Every one in his own right. All I repeat to you, my boy, is, behave as you ought to Tom Channing. Possibly I may pay the college school a visit this morning."

Harry opened his eyes to their utmost width. "You, papa! Whatever for?"

"That is my business," laughed Mr. Huntley. "It wants but twenty minutes to ten, Harry."

Harry at the hint bounded into the hall. He caught up his clean surplice, placed there ready for him, and stuck his trencher on his head, when he was laid hold of by Ellen.

"Harry, boy, it's a crying wrong against Tom Channing. Hamish never did it——"

"*Hamish!*" interrupted Harry, with a broad grin. "A sign who you are thinking of, mademoiselle."

Mademoiselle turned the colour of the scarlet door-mat. "You know I meant to say Arthur, stupid boy! It's a crying wrong, Harry, upon Tom Channing. Looking at it in the worst light, *he* has been guilty of nothing to forfeit his right. If you can help him to the seniorship instead of supplanting him, be a brave boy and do it. God sees all things."

"I shall be late, as sure as a gun!" impatiently returned Harry. And away he sped through the rain and mud, never slacking speed till he was in the college schoolroom.

He hung up his trencher, flung his surplice on a bench, and went straight up with outstretched hand to Tom Channing, who stood as senior unfolding the roll. "Good luck to you, old fellow!" cried he in a clear voice that rang through the spacious room. "I hope, with all my heart, that you'll be in this post for many a day."

"Thank you, Huntley," responded Tom. And he proceeded to call over the roll, though his cheek burnt at sundry hisses that came in subdued tones from various parts of the room.

Every boy was present—not a king's scholar but answered to his name; and Tom signed the roll for the first time. "Channing, acting senior." Not "Channing, senior," yet. It was a whim of Mr. Pye's that on Sundays and saints' days—that is, whenever the king's scholars had to attend service—the senior boy should sign the roll.

Then they put on their surplices; and rather damp surplices some of them were. The boys disdained bags; let the weather be what it might, the surplices, like themselves, went openly through it. Ready in their surplices and trenchers, Tom Channing gave the word of command, and they were on the point of filing out, when a freak took Pierce senior to leave his proper place in the ranks and walk by the side of Brittle.

"Halt!" said Channing. "Pierce senior, take your place."

"I shan't," returned Pierce. "Who is to compel me?" he added, with a mocking laugh. "We are without a senior for once."

"I will," thundered Tom, his face turning white at the implied sneer, the incipient disobedience. "I stand here as the school's senior now, whatever I may do later, and I will be obeyed. Return to your proper place."

There was that in Tom's eye, in Tom's tone, that somehow overawed Master Pierce, and he walked sheepishly to his own place. There was no mistaking that Channing would make a firm senior. The boys proceeded, two and two, decorously through the cloisters, snatching off their trenchers as they entered the college gates. Tom and Huntley walked last, Tom bearing the keys. The choir gained, the two branched off right and left, Huntley placing himself at the head of the boys on the left, or *cantori* side; Tom assuming his place as acting senior on the *decani*. When they should sit next in that cathedral would their posts be reversed?

The dean was present; also three canons—Dr. Burrows (who was sub-dean), Dr. Gardner, and Mr. Mence. The headmaster chanted, and in the stall next to him sat Gaunt.

Gaunt had discarded his surplice with his schoolboy life; but curiosity with regard to the seniorship brought him amongst them again that day. "I hope you'll keep the place, Channing," he whispered to him, as he passed the boys to get to his stall. Arthur Channing was at his place at the organ.

Ere eleven o'clock struck service was over, and the boys marched back again; not to the schoolroom—into the chapter-house. The examination, which took place once in three years, was there held. It was conducted quite in a formal manner—Mr. Galloway, as chapter clerk, being present, to call over the roll. The dean, the three prebendaries who had been at service, the head and other masters of the school, all stood together in the chapter-house; and the king's scholars, wearing their surplices still, were ranged in a circle before them.

The dean took the examination. Dr. Burrows put a question now and then, but the dean chiefly took it. There is neither space nor time to follow it in detail here: and nobody would care to read it if it were followed. As a whole, the school acquitted itself well, doing credit to its masters; one of the chapter—it was Dr. Gardner, and the only word he spoke throughout—remarked that the head boy was a sound scholar, meaning Tom Channing.

The business over, the dean's words of commendation spoken, then the headmaster took a step forward and cleared his throat. He addressed himself to the boys exclusively; for what he had to say had reference to them and himself alone—it was supposed not to concern the clergy. As to the boys, those of them who were of an excitable temperament looked quite pale with suspense, now the long-expected moment was come. Channing? Huntley? Yorke? Which of the three would it be?

"The praise bestowed upon you, gentlemen, by the dean and chapter has been, if possible, more gratifying to myself than to you. It would be superfluous in me to add a word to the admonition given you by the Very Reverend the Dean as to your future conduct and scholarly improvement. I can only hope, with him, that they may continue to be such as to afford satisfaction to myself and to those gentlemen who are associated with me as masters in the collegiate school."

A pause and a dead silence. The headmaster cleared his throat again, and went on,—

"The retirement of William Gaunt from the school renders the seniorship vacant. I am sorry that circumstances, to which I will not more particularly allude, prevent my bestowing it upon the boy whose name stands first upon the rolls, Thomas Ingram Channing. I regret this the more, that it is not from any personal fault of Channing's that he is passed over; and this fact I beg may be most distinctly understood. Next to Channing's name stands that of Henry Huntley, and to him I award the seniorship.—Henry Huntley, you are appointed senior of Helstonleigh collegiate school. Take your place."

The dead silence was succeeded by a buzz, a murmur, suppressed almost as soon as heard. Tom Channing's face turned scarlet, then became deadly white. It was a cruel blow. Huntley, with an impetuous step, advanced a few paces, and spoke up bravely, addressing the master.

"I thank you, sir, for the honour you have conferred upon me, but I have no right to it, either by claim or merit. I feel that it is but usurping the place of Channing. Can't you give it to him, please, sir, instead of to me?"

The speech, begun formally and grandly enough for a royal president at a public dinner, and ending in its schoolboy fashion, drew a smile from more than one present. "No," was all the answer vouchsafed by Mr. Pye, but it was spoken with unmistakable emphasis, and he pointed his finger authoritatively to the place already vacated by Tom Channing. Huntley bowed, and took it; and the next thing seen by the boys was Mr. Galloway altering the roll. He transposed the names of Channing and Huntley.

The boys, bowing to the clergy, filed out, and proceeded to the schoolroom, the masters following them. Tom Channing was very silent. Huntley was silent. Yorke, feeling mad with everybody, was silent. In short, the whole school was silent. Channing delivered the keys of the school to Huntley; and Mr. Pye, with his own hands, took out the roll and made the alteration in the names, for the roll belonging to the chapter-house was not, as you may have thought, the everyday roll of the schoolroom. "Take care what you are about, Huntley," said the master. "A careless senior never finds favour with me."

"Very well, sir," replied Huntley. But he was perfectly conscious, as he spoke, that his chief fault as senior would be that of carelessness. And Gaunt, who was standing by, and knew it also, telegraphed a significant look to Huntley. The other masters went up to Huntley, shook hands, and congratulated him, for that was the custom of the school; indeed, it was for that purpose only that the masters had gone into the schoolroom, where they had, that day, no business. Gaunt followed suit next in shaking hands and congratulating, and the school afterwards, Gerald Yorke doing his part with a bad grace.

"Thank you all," said Harry Huntley. "But it ought to have been Tom Channing." Poor Tom's feelings during all this may be imagined.

The king's scholars were slinging their surplices on their arms to depart, for they had full holiday for the remainder of the day, when they were surprised by the entrance of Mr. Huntley. He went straight up to the headmaster, nodding pleasantly to the boys, right and left.

"Well, and who is your important senior?" he gaily demanded of the master.

"Henry Huntley."

Mr. Huntley drew in his lips. "For another's sake I am sorry to hear it. But I can only express my hope that he will do his duty."

"I have just been telling him so," observed the master.

"What brings me here is this, sir," continued Mr. Huntley to the master. "Knowing there was a doubt as to which of the three senior boys would be chosen, I wished, should it prove to be my son, to speak a word about the Oxford exhibition, which, I believe, generally accompanies the seniorship. It falls due next Easter."

"Yes," said Mr. Pye.

"Then allow me to decline it for my son," replied Mr. Huntley. "He will not need it, and therefore should not stand in the light of any other boy. I deemed it well, sir, to state this at once."

"Thank you," warmly responded the headmaster. He knew that it was an unselfish, not to say generous, deed.

Mr. Huntley approached Tom Channing. He took his hand; he shook it heartily, with every mark of affection and respect. "You must not allow this exaltation of Harry to lessen the friendship you and he entertain for each other," he said in tones that reached every pair of ears present; and not one but was turned up to listen. "You are more deserving of the place than he, and I am deeply sorry for the circumstances which have caused him to supplant you. Never mind, Tom; bear on bravely, lad, and you'll outlive vexation. Continue to be worthy of your noble father; continue to be my son's friend; there is no boy living whom I would so soon he took pattern by as by you."

The hot tears rushed into Tom's eyes and his lip quivered. But that he remembered where he was, he might have lost his self-control. "Thank you, sir," he answered in a low tone.

"Whew!" whistled Tod Yorke as they were going out. "A fine friend he is! A thief's brother."

"A thief's brother! A thief's brother!" was the echo.

"But he's not our senior. Ha! ha! that would have been a good joke! He's not our senior!"

And down the steps they clattered, and went splashing home, as they had come, they and their surplices, through the wet streets and the rain.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GHOST.

THE moon was high in the heavens, lighting up the tower of the cathedral, illuminating its pinnacles, glittering through the elm trees, bringing forth into view even the dark old ivy on the prebendal houses. A fair night—all too fair for the game that was going to be played in it.

When the Helstonleigh college boys resolved upon what they were pleased to term a "lark"—and, to do them justice, they regarded this, their prospective night's work, in no graver light—they carried it out artistically, with a completeness, a skill, worthy of a better cause. Several days had they been hatching this—laying their plans, arranging the details; it would be their own bungling fault if it miscarried. But the college boys were not bunglers.

Stripped of its details, the bare plot was to exhibit a "ghost" in the cloisters, and to get Charley Channing to pass through them. The seniors knew nothing of the project. Huntley—it was the day following his promotion—would have stopped it at once, careless as he was. Tom Channing would have stopped it. Gerald Yorke might or might not, but Tod had taken care not to tell Gerald. And Griffin, who was burning to exercise in any way his newly-acquired power, would certainly have stopped it.

They had been too wise to let it come to the knowledge of the seniors. The most difficult part of the business had been old Ketch; but that was managed.

The moonlight shone peacefully on the Boundaries, and the conspirators were stealing up, by ones and twos, to their place of meeting round the dark trunks of the elm trees. Fine as it was overhead, it was less so underfoot. The previous day, you may remember, had been a wet one; the night had been wet, and also the forepart of the present day. Schoolboys are not particularly given to reticence, and a few more than the original conspirators had been taken into the plot. They were winding up now, in the weird moonlight, for the hour was approaching.

Once more we must pay a visit to Mr. Ketch in his lodge at his supper hour. Mr. Ketch had changed his hour for that important meal. Growing old with age or with lumbago, he found early rest congenial to his bones, as he informed his friends; so he supped at seven, and retired betimes. Since the trick played him in the summer, he had taken to have his pint of ale brought to him, deeming it more prudent not to leave his lodge and the keys to fetch it. This was known to the boys, and it rendered their plans a little more difficult.

Mr. Ketch, I say, sat in his lodge, having locked up the cloisters about an hour before, sneezing and wheezing, for he was suffering from a cold, caught the day previously in the wet. He was spelling over a weekly twopenny newspaper, borrowed from the public-house, by the help of a flaring tallow candle and a pair of spectacles, of which one glass was out. Cynically severe was he over everything he read, as you know it was in the nature of Mr. Ketch to be. As the three-quarters past six chimed out from the cathedral clock, his door was suddenly opened, and a voice called out "Beer!" Mr. Ketch's supper ale had arrived.

But the arrival did not give that gentleman pleasure, and he started up in what, but for the respect we bear him, we might call a fury. Dashing his one-eyed glasses on the table, he attacked the man,—

"What d'ye mean with your 'beer' at this time o' the evening? It wants a quarter to seven! Haven't you got no ears? haven't you got no clock at your place? D'ye think I shall take it in now?"

"Well, it just comes to this," said the man, who was the brewer at the public-house, and made himself useful at odd jobs in his spare time: "if you don't like to take it in now, you can't have it at all, of my bringing. I be a-going up to t'other end of the town, and shan't be back of this side ten."

Mr. Ketch, with much groaning and grumbling, took the ale and poured it into a jug of his own—a handsome jug, that had been in the wars and lost its spout and handle—giving back the public-house jug to the man. "You serve me such a imperant trick again as to bring my ale a quarter of a hour aforehand, that's all!" snarled he.

The man received the jug, and went off whistling; he had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ketch and his temper well. That gentleman shut his door with a bang, and proceeded to get out his customary bread and cheese. Not that he had any great love for a bread-and-cheese supper, as a matter of taste: he would very much have preferred something more dainty; only dainties and Mr. Ketch's pocket didn't agree.

"They wants to be took down a notch, that public—sending out a man's supper beer a quarter afore seven, when it ain't ordered to come till seven strikes. Much they cares if it stops a-waiting and a-flattening, and gets undrinkable! Be I a slave that I should be forced to swaller my supper afore my tea have well gone down, just to please them? They have got a sight too much custom, that's what it is."

He took a slight draught of the offending ale, and was critically surveying the loaf before applying to it that green-handled knife of his, whose native elegance you have heard of, when a second summons was heard at the door—a very timid one this time.

Mr. Ketch flung down the bread and the knife. "What's the reason I can't get a meal in quiet? Who is it?"

There was no response to this, save a second faint tapping. "Come in!" roared out he. "Pull the string o' the latch."

But nobody came in, spite of this lucid direction; and the timid tapping, which seemed to proceed from very small knuckles, was repeated again. Mr. Ketch was fain to go, grunting, and open it.

A young damsel of eight or so, in a tattered tippet and a large bonnet—probably her mother's—stood there curtsying. "Please, sir, Mr. Ketch is wanted."

Mr. Ketch was rather taken aback at this strange address, and surveyed its messenger in astonishment. "Who be you? and who wants him?" growled he.

"Please, sir, it's a gentleman as is a-waiting at the big green gates," was the reply. "Mr. Ketch is to go to him this minute—he told me to come and say so; and if you didn't make haste, he should be gone."

"Can't you speak consistent?" snarled Ketch. "Who is the gentleman?"

"Please, sir, I think it's the bishop."

This put Ketch in a fluster. The "big green gates" could only have reference to the private entrance to the bishop's garden, which entrance his lordship used when attending the cathedral. That the bishop was in Helstonleigh Ketch knew. He had arrived that day, after a short absence. What on earth could he want with *him?* Never doubting, in his hurry, the genuineness of the message, Ketch pulled his door to, and stepped off, the young messenger having already decamped. The green gates were not one minute's walk from the lodge—though a projecting buttress of the cathedral prevented the one being in sight of the other—and old Ketch gained them and looked around.

Where was the bishop? The iron gates, the garden, the white stones at his feet, the towering cathedral aloft, all lay cold and calm in the moonlight, but of human sound or sight there was none. The gates were locked when he came to try them, and he could not see the bishop anywhere.

He was not likely to see him. Stephen Bywater, who took upon himself much of the plot's acting part—of which, to give him his due, he was boldly capable—had been on the watch in the street near the cathedral for a messenger that would suit his purpose. Seeing this young damsel hurrying along with a jug in her hand, possibly to buy beer for *her* home supper, he waylaid her.

"Little ninepins, would you like to get threepence?" asked he. "You shall have it if you'll carry a message for me close by."

"Little ninepins" had probably never had a whole threepence to herself in her young life; she caught at the tempting suggestion, and Bywater drilled into her his instructions, finding her excessively stupid over the process. Perhaps that was all the better. "Now mind, you are *not* to say who wants Mr. Ketch unless he asks," repeated he for about the fifth time, as she was departing to do the errand. "If he asks, say you think it's the bishop."

So she went and delivered it. But had old Ketch's temper allowed him to go into minute questioning, he might have discovered the trick. Bywater stealthily followed the child near the lodge, screening himself from observation; and as soon as old Ketch hobbled out of it, he popped in, snatched the cloister keys from their nail, and deposited a piece of paper, folded as a note, on Ketch's table. Then he made off.

Back came Ketch after a while. He did not know quite what to make of it, but rather inclined to the opinion that the bishop had not waited for him. "He might have wanted me to take a errand round to the deanery," soliloquized he. And this thought had caused him to tarry about the gates, so that he was absent from his lodge quite ten minutes. The first thing he saw on entering was the bit of paper on his table. He seized and opened it, grumbling aloud that folks used his house just as they pleased, going in and out without reference to his presence or his absence. The note, written in pencil, purported to be from Joseph Jenkins. It ran as follows:—

"My old father is coming up to our place to-night to eat a bit of supper, and he says he should like you to join him, which I and Mrs. J. shall be happy if you will, at seven o'clock. It's tripe and onions.—Yours,

"J. JENKINS."

Now, if there was one delicacy known to this world more delicious to old Ketch's palate than another it was tripe, seasoned with plenty of onions. His mouth watered as he read. He was aware that it was—to use the phraseology of Helstonleigh—"tripe night." On two nights in the week tripe was sold in the town ready dressed, onions and all. This was one; and Ketch anticipated a glorious treat. In too great a hurry to cast so much as a glance round his lodge (crafty Bywater had been deep), not stopping even to put up the loaf and the cheese and the green-handled knife, only drinking the beer, away hobbled Ketch as fast as his lumbago would allow him, locking safely his door, and not having observed the absence of the keys.

"He ain't a bad sort that Joe Jenkins," allowed he, conciliated beyond everything at the prospect the invitation held out, and talking to himself as he limped away towards the street. "He don't write a bad hand neither! It's a plain un—not one o' them new-fangled scrawls that you can't read. Him and his wife have held up their heads a cut above me—oh yes, they have, though, for all Joe's humbleness—but the grand folks be a-coming to. Old Jenkins has always said we'd have a supper together some night, him and me; I suppose this is it. I wonder what made him take and have it at Joe's. If Joe don't soon get better nor he have looked lately——"

The first chime of the cathedral clock giving notice of the hour seven! Old Ketch broke out all in a heat, and tried to hobble along quicker. Seven o'clock! What if, through being late, his share of the tripe and onions should be eaten!

Peering out every now and then from the deep shade cast by one of the angles of the cathedral, and as swiftly and cautiously drawn back again, was a trencher, apparently watching Ketch. As soon as that functionary was fairly launched on his way, the trencher came out entirely, and went flying at a swift pace round the college to the Boundaries.

It was not worn by Bywater. Bywater, by the help of the filched keys, was safe in the cloisters, absorbed with his companions in the preparations for the grand event of the night. In point of fact, they were getting up Pierce senior. Their precise mode of doing that need not be given. They had requisites in abundance, having disputed among themselves which should be at the honour of the contribution, and the result was an over-prodigality.

"There's seven!" exclaimed Bywater in an agony, as the clock struck. "Make haste, Pierce! The young one was to come out at a quarter-past. If you're not ready, it will ruin all."

"I shall be ready and waiting, if you don't bother," was the response of Pierce. "I wonder if old Ketch is safely off."

"What a stunning fright Ketch would be in if he came in here and met the ghost!" exclaimed Hurst. "He'd never think it was anything less than the Old Gentleman come for him."

A chorus of laughter, which Hurst himself hushed. It would not do for noise to be heard in the cloisters at that hour.

There was nothing to which poor Charley Channing was more sensitive than to ridicule on the subject of his unhappy failing—the propensity to fear; and there is no failing to which schoolboys are more intolerant. Of moral courage—that is, of courage in the cause of right—Charles had plenty; of physical courage, little. Apart from the misfortune of having had supernatural terror implanted in him in childhood, he would never have been physically brave. Schoolboys cannot understand that this shrinking from danger (I speak of palpable danger), which they call cowardice, nearly always emanates from a superior intellect. Where the mental powers are of a high order, the imagination unusually awakened, danger is sure to be keenly perceived, and sensitively shrunk from. In proportion will be the shrinking dread of ridicule. Charles Channing possessed this dread in a remarkable degree. You may therefore judge how he felt when he found it mockingly alluded to by Bywater.

On this very day that we are writing of, Bywater caught Charles, and imparted to him in profound confidence an important secret—that a choice few of the boys were about to play old Ketch a trick, obtain the keys, and have a game in the cloisters by moonlight. A place in the play, he said, had been assigned to Charles. Charles hesitated—not because it might be wrong so to cheat Ketch (Ketch was the common enemy of the boys, of Charley as of the rest), but because he had plenty of lessons to do. This was Bywater's opportunity; he chose to interpret the hesitation differently.

"So you are afraid, Miss Charley! Ho, ho! Do you think the cloisters will be dark? that the moon won't keep the ghosts away? I say, it *can't* be true, what I heard the other day, that you dare not be in the dark, lest ghosts should come and run away with you!"

"Nonsense, Bywater!" returned Charley, changing colour like a conscious girl.

"Well, if you are *not* afraid, you'll come and join us," sarcastically returned Bywater. "We shall have stunning good sport. There'll be about a dozen of us. Rubbish to your lessons! You need not be away from them more than an hour. It won't be *dark*, Miss Channing."

After this nothing would have kept Charley away, fearing their ridicule. He promised faithfully to be in the cloisters at a quarter-past seven.

Accordingly, the instant tea was over, he got to his lessons, Tom at one side of the table—who had more, in proportion, to do than Charles—he at the other. Thus were they engaged when Hamish entered.

"What sort of a night is it, Hamish?" asked Charles, thinking of the projected night play.

"Fine," replied Hamish. "Where are they all?"

"Constance is in the drawing-room giving Annabel her music lesson. Arthur's there too, I think, copying music."

The silence was resumed. Hamish stood over the fire in thought. Tom and Charles went on with their studies. "O dear!" presently exclaimed the latter in a tone of subdued impatience.

Hamish turned his eyes upon him. He thought the bright young face looked unusually weary. "What is it, Charley, boy?"

"It's this Latin, Hamish. I can't make it come right. And Tom has not time to tell me."

"Bring the Latin here."

Charles carried his difficulties to Hamish. "It won't come right," repeated he.

"Like Mrs. Dora Copperfield's figures, I expect, that wouldn't add up," said Hamish, as he cast his eyes over the exercise book. "Halloa, young gentleman, what's this? You have been cribbing." He had seen in the past leaves certain exercises so excellently well done as to leave no doubt upon the point.

Charles turned crimson. Cribs were particularly objectionable to Mr. Channing, who had forbidden their use, so far as his sons were concerned. "I could not help it, Hamish. I used the cribs for about a week. The desk made me."

"Made you!"

"Well," confessed Charley, "there has been a row about the cribbing. The rest had cribbed, and I had not, and somehow, through that, it came out to the second master. He asked me a lot of questions, and I was obliged to tell. It made the desk savage, and they said I must do as they did."

"Which you complied with! Nice young gentlemen, all of you!"

"Only for five or six days, Hamish. You may see that if you look. I am doing my lessons on the square now, as I did before."

"And don't go off the square again, if you please, sir," repeated Hamish, "or you and I may quarrel. If Mr. Channing is not here, I am."

"You don't know how tyrannical the college boys are."

"Don't I!" said Hamish. "I was a college boy rather longer than you have been yet, Master Charley."

He sat down to the table and so smoothed Charley's difficulties that the boy soon went on swimmingly, and Hamish left him. "How do you get on, Tom?" Hamish asked.

"Better than I need," was Tom's answer, delivered somewhat roughly. "After the injustice done me yesterday, it does not much matter how I get on."

Hamish turned himself round to the fire and said no more, neither attempting to console nor soothe. Charles's ears were listening for the quarter-past seven; and the moment it chimed out, he quitted his work, took his trencher from the hall, and departed, saying nothing to anybody.

He went along whistling, past Dr. Gardner's house, past the deanery; they, and the cathedral tower rising above them, looked gray in the moonlight. He picked up a stone and sent it right into one of the elm trees; some of the birds, disturbed from their roost, flew out, croaking, over his head. In the old days of superstition it might have been looked upon as an ill omen, coupled with what was to follow. Ah, Charley, if you could but foresee what is before you! If Mrs. Channing, from her unconscious, far-off sojourn, could but know what grievous ill is about to overtake her boy!

Poor Charley suspected nothing. He was whistling a merry tune, laughing, boy-like, at the discomfiture of the cawing rooks, and anticipating the stolen game he and his friends were about to enjoy on forbidden ground. Not a boy in the school loved play better than did Master Charles Channing.

A door on the opposite side of the Boundaries was suddenly opened, to give egress to one who sprang out with a bound. It was Gerald Yorke. And Charley congratulated himself that they were on opposite sides, for he had been warned that this escapade was to be kept from the seniors.

At that minute he saw a boy come forth from the cloisters, and softly whistle to him, as if in token that he was being waited for. Charley answered the whistle, and set off to run. Which of the boys it was he could not tell; the outline of the form and the college cap were visible enough in the moonlight, but not the face. When he gained the cloister entrance he could no longer see him, but supposed the boy had preceded him into the cloisters. On went Charley, groping his way down the narrow passage. "Where are you?" called out he.

There was no answer. Once in the cloisters, a faint light came in from the open windows overlooking the burial-yard—a very faint light, indeed, for the buildings all round it were so high as almost to shut out a view of the sky; you must go close to the window-frame before you could see it.

"I—s-a-a-y!" roared Charley again, at the top of his voice, "where are you all? Is nobody here?"

There came neither response nor sign of it. One faint sound certainly did seem to strike upon his ear from behind; it was like the click of a lock being turned. Charley looked sharply round, but all seemed still again. The low, dark, narrow passage was behind him; the dim cloisters were before him; he was standing at the corner formed by the east and south quadrangles, and the pale burial-ground in their midst, with its damp grass and its gravestones, looked cold and lonesome in the moonlight.

The strange silence—it was not the silence of daylight—struck upon Charles with dismay. "You fellows there!" he called out again in desperation. "What's the good of playing up this nonsense?"

The tones of his voice died away in the echoes of the cloisters, but of other answer there was none. At that instant a rook, no doubt one of the birds he had disturbed, came diving down, and flopped its wings across the burial-ground. The sight of something moving there nearly startled Charles out of his senses, and the matter was not much mended when he discovered it was only a bird. He turned, and flew down the passage to the entrance quicker than he had come up it; but, instead of passing out, he found the iron gate closed. What could have shut it? There was no wind. And if there had been a wind ever so boisterous, it could scarcely have moved that little low gate, for it opened inwards.

Charles seized it to pull it open. It resisted his efforts. He tried to shake it, but little came of that, for the gate was fastened firmly. Bit by bit stole the conviction over his mind that he was locked in.

Then a panic seized him. He was locked in the ghostly cloisters, close to the graves of the dead—on the very spot where, as idle tales went, the monks of bygone ages came out of those recording stones under his feet and showed themselves at midnight. Not a step could he take round the cloisters but his foot must press those stones. To be locked in the cloisters had been nothing (in this point of view) for brave, grown, sensible men, such as the bishop, Jenkins, and Ketch—and they had been three in company, besides—but for many a boy it would have been a great deal, and for Charles Channing it was awful.

That he was alone he never doubted. He believed—as fully as belief, or any other feeling could flash into his horrified mind and find a place in it—that Bywater had decoyed him into the cloisters and left him there, in return for his refusal to disclose what he knew of the suspicions bearing upon the damaged surplice. All the dread terrors of his childhood rose up before him. To say that he was mad in that moment might not be quite correct, but it is certain his mind was not perfectly sane. His whole body, his face, his hair, grew damp in an instant, as does one in mortal agony; and with a smothered cry, which was not like that of a human being, he turned and fled through the cloisters, in the vague hope to find the other gate open.

It may be difficult for some of you to understand this excessive terror, albeit the situation was not a particularly desirable one. A college boy, in these enlightened days, laughs at supernatural tales as the delusions of ignorance in ages past; but for those who have had the misfortune to be imbued in infancy with superstition, as was Charles Channing, the terror exists still, college boys though they may be. He could not have told (had he been collected enough to tell anything) what his precise dread was as he flew though the cloisters. None can at these moments. A sort of bugbear rises up in the mind, and they shrink from it, though they see not what its exact nature may be; but it is a bugbear that can neither be faced nor borne.

Feeling like one about to die; feeling as if death, in that awful moment, might be a boon rather than the contrary, Charles sped down the east quadrangle and turned into the north. At the extremity of the north side, forming the angle between it and the west, commenced the narrow passage similar to the one he had just traversed, which led to the west gate of egress. A faint glimmering of the white-flagged stones beyond this gate gave a promise that it was open. A half-uttered sound of thankfulness escaped him, and he sped on.

Ah! but what was that? What was it that he came upon in the middle of the north quadrangle, standing within the niches? A towering white form, with a ghastly face, telling of the dead, a mysterious, supernatural-looking blue flame lighting it up round about. It came out of the niche and advanced slowly upon him. An awful cry escaped from his heart, and went ringing up to the roof of the cloisters. Oh that the dean, sitting in his deanery contiguous to the chapter-house, could have heard that helpless cry of anguish!—that Dr. Burrows, nearer still, could have heard it and burst forth into the cloisters with the succour of his presence! No, no; there could be no succour for a place that was supposed to be empty and closed.

Back to the locked gate, with perhaps the apparition following him? or forward *past* IT to the open door of egress? Which was it to be? In these moments there can be no reason to guide the course; but there is instinct; and instinct took that ill-fated child to the open door.

How he got past the sight it is impossible to tell. Had it been right in front of his path, he never would have got past it. But it had made a halt when just beyond the niche, not coming out very far. With his poor hands stretched out and his breath leaving him, Charles did get by, and made for the door, the ghost bringing up the rear with a yell; while those old cloister niches, when he was fairly gone, grew alive with moving figures, which came out of their dark corners and shrieked aloud with laughter.

Away, he knew not whither—away, like one who is being pursued by an unearthly phantom, deep catchings of the breath, as will follow undue bodily exertion, telling of something not right within; wild, low, abrupt sounds breaking from him at intervals—thus he flew, turning to the left, which took him towards the river. Anywhere from the dreaded cloisters; anywhere from the old gray ghostly edifice; anywhere in his dread and agony! He dashed past the boat-house, down the steps, turning on to the river pathway, and——

Whether the light hanging at the boat-house deceived his sight—whether the slippery mud caused him to lose his footing—whether he was running too quickly and could not stop himself in time—or whether, in his irrepressible fear, he threw himself unconsciously in, to escape what might be behind him, will never be known. Certain it is, the unhappy boy went plunge into the river, another and a last wild cry escaping him as the waters closed over his head.

CHAPTER XL.

MR. KETCH'S EVENING VISIT.

It were surely a breach of politeness on our part not to attend Mr. Ketch in his impromptu evening visit. He shuffled along at the very top of his speed, his mouth watering all the way, while the delicious odour of the tripe and onions appeared to be borne on the air to his olfactory nerves, so powerful is the force of fancy. Arrived at his destination, he found the shop closed. It was Mrs. Jenkins's custom to close at seven from October to April inclusive; and the shutters had now just been put up. Mr. Ketch seized the knocker on the shop-door—there was no other entrance to the house—and brought it down with a force that shook the first-floor sitting-room, and startled Mr. Harper, the lay-clerk, nearly out of his armchair as he sat before the fire. Mrs. Jenkins's maid, a young person of seventeen, very much given to blacking her face, opened it.

"Be I in time?" demanded Ketch, his voice all in a shake.

"In time for what?" responded the girl.

"Why, for supper," said Ketch, penetrating into the shop, which was lighted by a candle that stood on the counter, the one the girl had brought in her hand. "Is old Jenkins the bedesman come yet?"

"Old Jenkins ain't here," said she. "You'd better go into the parlour, if you be come to supper."

Ketch went down the shop, sniffing curiously. Sharp as fancy is, he could not say that his nose was yet regaled with the scent of the onions, but he supposed the saucepan lid might be on; for, as was known to Mr. Ketch, and to other of the initiated in tripe mysteries, it was generally deemed advisable, by good housewives, to give the tripe a boil up at home, lest it should have got cold in its transit from the vendor's. The girl threw open the door of the small parlour, and told him he might sit down if he liked; she did not overburden the gentleman with civility. "Missis'll be here soon," said she.

Ketch entered the parlour and sat down. There was a fire in the grate, but no light; and there were not, so far as Ketch could see, any preparations yet for the entertainment. "They be a-going to have it downstairs in the kitchen," soliloquized he. "And that's a sight more comfortabler. She's gone out to fetch it, I shouldn't wonder!" he continued, alluding to Mrs. Jenkins, and sniffing again strongly, but obtaining no result. "That's right! She won't let 'em serve her with short onions, she won't; she have got a tongue of her own. I wonder how much beer there'll be!"

He sat on pretty patiently, for him, about half an hour, sniffing incessantly, and then he took the liberty of replenishing the fire from a coal-box that stood there. Another quarter of an hour was passed much more impatiently, when Ketch began to grow uneasy and lose himself in all sorts of grave conjectures. Could she have arrived too late at the tripe-shop, and found the tripe all sold, and so had stopped out to supper somewhere herself? Such a thing as a run on the delicacy had occurred more than once, to Ketch's certain knowledge, and tardy customers had been sent away disappointed, to wait in longing anticipations for the next tripe night. He went into a cold perspiration at the bare idea—almost like another had done that night in the cloisters in his terrible agony. And where was old Jenkins all this time that he had not come? And where was Joe? A pretty thing to invite a gentleman out to a hasty supper, and serve him in this way! What could they mean by it?"

He groped his way round the corner of the shop to where lay the kitchen stairs, whose position he pretty well knew, and called down them,—

"Here, Sally, Betty—whatever your name is—ain't there nobody at home?"

The girl heard and came forth, the same candle in her hand. "Who be you a-calling to, I'd like to know? My name's Lidyar, if you please."

"Where's your missis?" responded Ketch, suffering the matter of the name to drop into abeyance. "I she gone out for the tripe?"

"Gone out for what tripe?" asked the girl. "What be you a-talking of?"

"The tripe for supper," said Ketch.

"There ain't no tripe for supper," replied she.

"There is tripe for supper," persisted Ketch. "And me and old Jenkins is a-going to have some of it. There's tripe and onions."

The girl shook her head. "I dun know nothing about it. Missis is upstairs a-fixing the mustard."

Oh come! this gave a promise of something. Old Ketch thought mustard the greatest condiment that tripe could be accompanied by, in conjunction with onions. But she must have been a long while "fixing" the mustard—whatever that might mean. And where was the tripe? His spirits dropped again, and he grew rather exasperated. "Go up and ask your missis how long I be to wait?" he growled. "I was told to come here at seven for supper, and now it's a'most eight."

The girl, feeling possibly a little curiosity herself, came up with her candle. "Master ain't so well to-night," remarked she. "He's gone to bed, and missis is a-putting him a plaster on his chest."

The words fell on old Ketch like ice. "A mustard-plaster?" shrieked he.

"What else but a mustard-plaster!" she retorted. "Did you think it was a pitch? There's a fire lighted up yonder in his room grate, and she's a-making of it there."

Nothing more sure. Poor Jenkins, who had coughed more than usual the last two days, perhaps from the wet weather, and whose chest in consequence was very painful, had been ordered to bed this night by his wife when tea was over, going up herself, as soon as her shop was shut, to administer a mustard-plaster. Ketch was quite stunned with uncertainty. A man in bed, with a plaster to his chest, was not likely to invite company to supper.

Before he had seen his way out of the shock, or the girl had done staring at him, Mrs. Jenkins descended the stairs and joined them, having been attracted by the noise. She had slipped on an old buff dressing-gown over her clothes, in her capacity of nurse, and looked rather in deshabille—certainly not like a lady who is about to give an entertainment.

"He says he's come to supper—tripe and onions," said the girl, introducing Mr. Ketch and the subject unceremoniously to her wondering mistress.

Mrs. Jenkins, not much more famous for meekness in expressing her opinions than was Ketch, turned her gaze upon that gentleman. "*What* do you say you have come for?" asked she.

"Why, I have come for supper, that's what I have come for," shrieked Ketch, all in a tremble. "Jenkins invited me to supper, off tripe and onions, and I'd like to know what it all means, and where the supper is."

"You are going into your dotage," said Mrs. Jenkins, with an amount of scorn so great that it exasperated Ketch as much as the words themselves. "You'll be wanting a lunatic asylum next. Tripe and onions! If Jenkins was to hint at such a thing as a plate of tripe coming inside my house, I'd tripe him. There's nothing I have such a hatred to as tripe, and he knows it."

"Is this the way to treat a man?" foamed Ketch, his disappointment and his hunger driving him nearly into the state hinted at by Mrs. Jenkins. "Joe Jenkins takes and sends me down a note a hour ago to come here to supper with his old father, which it was to be tripe and onions! It *is* tripe night!" continued he, rather wandering from the point of argument, as the tears filled his eyes. "You can't deny as it's tripe night."

"Here, Lydia, open the door and let him out," cried Mrs. Jenkins, waving her hand imperatively towards it. "And what have you been at with your face again?" continued she, as the candle held by that damsel reflected its light aloft. "One can't see it for colly! If I *do* put you into the mask I have threatened, you won't like it, girl. —Hold your tongue, old Ketch, or I'll call Mr. Harper down to you. Write a note! What else? He has wrote no note; he has been too suffering the last few hours to think of notes, or of you either. You *are* a lunatic, it's my belief."

"I shall be drove one," sobbed Ketch. "I was promised a treat of tripe and onions——"

"Is that door open, Lydia? There! Take yourself and your tripe and onions off. My goodness me! disturbing my house with such a crazy errand!" And, taking old Ketch by the shoulders, who was rather feeble and tottery, from his lumbago and his age, Mrs. Jenkins politely marshalled him outside, and closed the door upon him.

"Insolent old fellow!" she exclaimed to her husband, to whom she went at once and related the occurrence. "I wonder what he'll pretend he has next from you! A note of invitation, indeed!"

"My dear," said Jenkins, revolving the news, and speaking as well as his old chest would allow him, "it must have been a trick played him by the young college gentlemen. We should not be too hard upon the poor old man. He's not very agreeable or pleasant-tempered, I'm afraid it must be allowed, but I'd not have sent him away without a bit of supper, my dear."

"I dare say you'd not," retorted Mrs. Jenkins. "All the world knows you are soft enough for anything. I have sent him away with a flea in his ear; that's what I have done."

Mr. Ketch had at length come to the same conclusion—that the invitation must be the work of the college gentlemen. Only fancy the unhappy man standing outside Mrs. Jenkins's inhospitable door! Deceived, betrayed, fainting for his supper, done out of the delicious tripe and onions, done out even of his own bread and cheese, and, so to say, of his beer—for that was gone—he leaned against the shutters and gave vent to a prolonged and piteous howl. It might have drawn tears from a stone.

In a frame of mind that was not enviable, he turned his steps homeward, clasping his hands upon his empty, ill-treated stomach, and vowing the most intense vengeance upon the college boys. The occurrence naturally caused him to cast back his thoughts to the other trick—the locking him in the cloisters, in which Jenkins had been a fellow-victim—and he doubled his fists in impotent anger. "This comes of their not having been flogged for that!" he groaned.

Engaged in these reflections of gall and bitterness, old Ketch gained his lodge, unlocked it, and entered. No wonder that he turned his eyes upon the cloister keys, the reminiscence being so strong within him.

But to say he turned his eyes upon the cloister keys is but a figure of speech. No keys were there. Ketch stood like a transfixed statue, and stared as hard as the flickering blaze from his dying fire would allow him. Seizing a match-box, he struck a light and held it to the hook. The keys were *not* there.

Ketch was no conjurer, and it never occurred to him to suspect that the keys had been removed before his own departure. "How had them wicked ones got in?" he foamed. "Had they forced his winder? had they took a skeleton key to his door? had they come down the chimbley? They was capable of all three exploits; and the more soot they collected about 'em in the descent the better they'd like it. He didn't think they'd mind a little fire. It was that insolent Bywater, or that young villain

Tod Yorke, or that undaunted Tom Channing, or perhaps the three leagued together! Nothing wouldn't tame *them.*"

He examined the window; he examined the door; he cast a glance up the chimney. Nothing, however, appeared to have been touched or disturbed, and there was no soot on the floor. Cutting off a piece of bread and cheese, groaning at it for its dryness, and eating it as he went, he proceeded out again, locking up his lodge as before.

Of course he bent his steps to the cloisters, going to the west gate. And there, perhaps to his surprise, perhaps not, he found the gate locked, just as he might have left it himself that very evening, and the keys hanging ingeniously, by means of the string, from one of the studded nails right over the keyhole.

"There ain't a boy in the school but what'll come to be hung!" danced old Ketch in his rage.

He would have preferred not to find the keys, but to go to the headmaster with a story of their loss—their theft. It was possible, it was just possible, that, going keys in hand, the master might refuse to give credence to his tale.

Away he hobbled, and arrived at the house of the headmaster. Check the first: the master was not at home. He had gone to a dinner-party. The other masters lived at a distance, and Ketch's old legs were aching. What was he to do? Make his complaint to somebody he was determined upon. The new senior, Huntley, lived too far off for his lumbago, so he turned his steps to the next senior's, Tom Channing, and demanded to see him.

Tom heard the story, which was given him in detail. He told Ketch—and with truth—that he knew nothing about it, but would make inquiries in the morning. Ketch was fain to depart, and Tom returned to the sitting-room and threw himself into a chair in a burst of laughter.

"What is the matter?" they asked.

"The primest lark," returned Tom. "Some of the fellows have been sending Ketch an invitation to sup at Jenkins's off tripe and onions, and when he got there he found it was a hoax, and Mrs. Jenkins turned him out again. That's what Master Charley must have gone after."

Hamish turned round. "Where *is* Charley, by the way?"

"Gone after it, there's no doubt," replied Tom. "Here's his exercise not finished yet, and his pen left inside the book. Oh yes; that's where he has gone!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SEARCH.

"TOM, where is Charles?"

"He is not in my pocket," responded Tom Channing, who was buried deep in his studies, as he had been for some hours.

"Thomas, that is not the proper way to answer me," resumed Constance in a tone of seriousness, for it was from her the question had proceeded. "It is strange he should run suddenly out in the abrupt way you describe, and remain so long as this. It is half-past nine! I am waiting to read."

"The boys are up to some trick to-night with Mr. Calcraft, Constance, and he is one of them," said Tom. "He is sure to be in soon."

Constance remained silent—not satisfied. A nameless, undefined sort of dread was creeping over her. Engaged with Annabel until eight o'clock, when she returned to the general sitting-room, she found Charles absent, much to her surprise. Expecting him to make his appearance every moment, the time may have seemed to her long, and his absence all the more unaccountable. It had now gone on to half-past nine, and still he was not come, and his lessons were not done. It was his hour for bedtime.

Tom had more than usual to do that night, and it was nearly ten when he rose from his books. Constance watched him put them aside and stretch himself. Then she spoke,—

"Tom, you must go and find Charles. I begin to feel uneasy. Something must have happened to keep him out like this."

The feeling "uneasy" rather amused Tom. Previsions of evil are not apt to torment schoolboys. "I expect the worst that has happened may be a battle royal with old Ketch," said he. "However, the young monkey had no business to cut short his lessons in the midst and go off in this way, so I'll just be after him and march him home."

Tom took his trencher and flew towards the cathedral.

He fully expected the boys would be gathered somewhere round it, not a hundred miles from old Ketch's lodge. But he could not come upon them anywhere. The lodge was closed, was dark and silent, showing every probability that its master had retired for the night to sleep away his discomfiture; the cloisters were closed, and the Boundaries lay calm in the moonlight, undisturbed by a single footstep. There was no sign of Charles, or of any other college boy.

Tom halted in indecision. "Where can he have gone to, I wonder? I'm sure I don't know where to look for him! I'll ask at Yorke's. If there's any mischief up, Tod's sure to know of it."

He crossed the Boundaries and rang at Lady Augusta's door. Tod himself opened it. Probably he thought it might be one of his friends, the conspirators; certainly he had not expected to find Tom Channing there, and he looked inclined to run away again.

"Tod Yorke, do you know anything of Charles?"

"Law! how should I know anything of him?" returned Tod, taking courage, and putting a bold face upon it. "Is he lost?"

"He is not lost, I suppose; but he has disappeared somewhere. Were you in the game with old Ketch tonight?"

"What game?" inquired Tod innocently.

But at this moment Gerald, hearing Tom's voice, came out of the sitting-room. Gerald Yorke had a little cooled down from his resentment against Tom. Since the decision of the previous day nearly all Gerald's wrath had been turned upon Mr. Pye because that gentleman had not exalted him to the seniorship. So great was it that he had no room to think of Tom; besides, Tom was a fellow-sufferer, and had been passed over equally with himself.

"What's the row?" asked Gerald.

Tom explained, stating what he had heard from Ketch of the trick the boys had played him, and Charley's absence. Gerald, who really was not cognizant of it in any way, listened with avidity, making his own comments, and enjoying beyond everything the account of Ketch's fast in the supper department. Both he and Tom exploded with mirth; and Tod, who said nothing, but listened with his hands in his pockets, dancing first on one leg, then on the other, nearly laughed himself into fits.

"What did they take out the cloister keys for?" demanded Gerald.

"Who's to know?" said Tom. "I thought Tod was sure to be in it."

"Don't I wish I had been!" responded that gentleman, turning up the whites of his eyes to give earnestness to the wish.

Gerald looked round at Tod, a faint suspicion stealing over him that the denial was less genuine than it appeared. In point of fact, Master Tod's had been the identical trencher spoken of as having watched the effect of the message upon old Ketch. "I say, Tod, you were off somewhere to-night for about two hours," said Gerald. "I'll declare you were."

"I know I was," said Tod readily. "I had an appointment with Mark Galloway, and I went to keep it. If you skinned me alive, Channing, I couldn't tell where Miss Charley is, or where he's likely to be."

True enough in the abstract. Tom Channing stopped talking a short while longer, and then ran home. "Is Charley in yet?" was his first question.

No, Charley was not in; and the household now became seriously concerned. It was past ten. By his leaving his lessons half done, and his pen inside his exercise-book—of which exercise he had not left many words to complete, but he had other studies to do—it was evident to them that he had not gone out intending to stay. Indeed, if he required to go out in an evening, he always asked leave, and mentioned where he was going.

"Haven't you found him?" exclaimed Judith, coming forward as Tom entered. "Where in the world can the child be?"

"Oh, he's safe somewhere," said Tom. "Don't worry your old head, Judy."

"It's fit that somebody should worry their heads," retorted Judith sharply to Tom. "He never stopped out like this afore—never! Pray Heaven there's no harm come a-nigh him!"

"Well done, Judy!" was Tom's answer. "Harm! What harm is likely to have come to him? Helstonleigh has not been shaken by an earthquake to-night, to swallow him up, and I don't suppose any voracious kite has descended from the skies and carried him off in her talons. You'll make a simpleton of that boy till he's twenty!"

Judith—who, truth to say, did look very much after Charley, love him and indulge him—wasted no more words on infidel Tom, but went straight up to Hamish's room and knocked at the door. Hamish was in it, at his writing-table as usual, and Judith heard a drawer opened and shut before he came to her.

"Mr. Hamish, it's very queer about the child!" said Judith. "I don't half like it."

"What! Is he not come in?"

"No, he's not. And just to look how he has left his books and his lessons about is enough to prove that something or other must have kept him. I declare my heart's all in a quake! Master Tom he has been out and can't find no traces of him—though it's hard to tell whether he troubled himself to look much. Boys be as careless one of another as so many young animals."

"I will come down directly, Judith."

He shut the door right in front of Judith's inquisitive nose, which was peering in to see what might be seen. Judith's curiosity in reference to her young master's night employment had increased rather than abated. Every night, night after night, as Hamish came home with the account books of the office under his arm, and carried them straight to his bedroom, Judith watched him go up with jealous eyes. Constance also watched him—watched him in a far more uneasy frame of mind than could be Judith's. The bringing home those books now, in Mr. Channing's absence, was only too plain a proof to Constance that his night work must be connected with them; and a perfectly sick feeling would rush over her heart. Surely there could be nothing amiss with the accounts!

Hamish shut the door, shutting out Judy. She heard him putting things away; she heard a lock turned, and the keys removed. Then he came forth and went down with Judith.

The difficulty was where to look for Charles. It was possible that he might have gone to the houses of any one of the schoolboys and be there staying; if not very likely, still it was by no means impossible. Tom was dispatched to Mr. Pye's, who had some half-dozen of the king's scholars boarding in his house, and thence to other houses in the vicinity. All with the like result; all denied knowledge of Charles. The college bell struck eleven, the sound booming out in the silence of the night on their listening ears; and with that sound Hamish grew alarmed.

They went out different ways—Hamish, Arthur, Tom, and Judith. Sarah was excessively anxious to make one of the searching-party, but Judith imperatively ordered her to stop at home and mind her own business. Judy ran round and about the college, like anybody wild—nothing extra on her shoulders, and the border of her mobcap flying. But the old red walls were high, and impenetrable, and silent, telling nothing of Charles Channing. She stopped at the low wall, extending from the side of the boat-house to some of the prebendal residences, and glanced over at the river. The water was flowing tranquilly along between its banks, giving out no sign that a young child was drowning, or had been drowned there not many hours before. "No," said Judy to herself, rejecting the doubt which had come over her as improbable, "he can't have got in there. We should have heard of it."

She turned and took a survey around. She did not know what to do or where to look. Still, cold, shadowy it all lay—the cathedral, the old houses, and the elm trees, with their birds, at rest now. "Where *can* he have got to?" exclaimed Judith, with a touch of temper.

One thing was certain, that it was of no use to wait where she was, and Judith betook herself home again. Just past the house of Lady Augusta Yorke she encountered the headmaster, who was walking towards his home. He said "Good-night" to Judith as he passed her; but she arrested him.

"We are in a fine way, sir! We can't find Master Charles."

"Not find Master Charles!" repeated the Reverend Mr. Pye. "How do you mean?"

"Why, it happened in this way, sir," said Judith. "He was at his lessons as usual with Master Tom, and he suddenly gets up and leaves them, and goes out, without saying a word to nobody. That was at seven, or a bit later; and he has never come in again!"

"He must be staying somewhere," remarked Mr. Pye.

"So we all thought, sir, till it got late. He's not likely to be staying anywhere now. Who'd keep him till this hour, a-terrifying of us all into fits? Ketch——"

"Halloa, Judy! Any luck?"

The interruption came from Tom Channing. He had discerned Judy's cap from the other side of the Boundaries, and now came running across, unconscious that her companion was the headmaster. Judy went on with her communication.

"Ketch, the porter, came to Master Tom an hour or two ago complaining that the college boys had been serving him a trick to-night. They had pretended to invite him out somewhere to supper, and stole his cloister keys while he was gone. Now, sir, I'd not like to say too much again that surly-tempered brown bear," went on Judy, "but if he has got anything to do with the keeping the child out, he ought to be punished."

Tom was up now, saw it was the master, and touched his trencher.

"Have you found your brother?" asked the master.

"No, sir. It is very strange where he can have got to."

"What trick have the boys been playing Ketch to-night?" resumed Mr. Pye. "Your servant tells me that he has been round to you with a complaint of them."

Tom went into a white heat. Judy ought to have kept her mouth shut. It was not his place to inform against the school privately to the master.

"Y—es," he hesitatingly said; for an untruth he would not tell.

"What was the complaint?" continued Mr. Pye. "Could this disappearance of your brother's be connected with it?"

"No, sir, I don't see that it could," replied Tom.

"You 'don't see!' Perhaps you'll let me see and judge. What had the boys been doing, Channing?" firmly spoke the master, perceiving his hesitation. "I *insist* upon knowing."

Tom was at his wits' end. He might not defy the master, on the one hand; on the other, he knew the school would send him to Coventry for ever and a day if he spoke, as he himself would have sent any other boy in it doing the like. He heartily wished Judy had been over in Asia before she had spoken of it, and her tongue with her.

"Were you in the affair yourself, pray?" asked the master.

"No, sir, indeed I was not; and I do not know a single boy who was. I have heard nothing of it except from Ketch."

"Then what is your objection to tell me?"

"Well, sir, you know the rules we hold amongst ourselves," said Tom, blurting out the truth in his desperation. "I scarcely dare tell you."

"Yes, you dare, Channing, when I command you to do so," was the significant answer.

Tom had no resource; and, very unwillingly, Ketch's details were drawn from him bit by bit—the pseudo-invitation, the disappointment touching the tripe and onions, the missing the cloister keys when he got home, and the finding them upon the outside of the west door.

"Did he enter the cloisters and examine them?" said the master, speaking hastily. A phase of probability had struck him which had not struck any of the Channings, and it was curious that it had not.

"I think not, sir," replied Tom.

"Then that's where Charles is—locked up in the cloisters!" said the master, the recollection of the former locking-up no doubt helping him to the conclusion. "The fact of the keys being left hanging outside the cloister door might have been sufficient to direct your suspicions."

Tom felt the force of the words, and was wondering how it was he had not thought of it, when a cry burst from Judith.

"If he is there, he never will come out alive! O sir, what will become of us?"

The master was surprised. He knew it was not a desirable situation for any young boy; but "never come out alive" were strong terms. Judy explained them. She poured into the master's ears the unhappy story of Charles having been frightened in childhood, of his propensity still to supernatural fears.

"Make haste round! We must get the cloisters open immediately!" exclaimed the master, as all the full truth of the dread imparted by Judith became clear to him. "Channing, you have light heels; run on, and knock up Ketch."

Tom tore off—never a lighter pair of heels than his to-night; and the master and the old servant followed. The master's sympathies, nay, his lively fears, were strongly awakened, and he could not leave the affair in this stage, late though the hour was.

They arrived to find Tom pummelling at Ketch's door. But to pummel was one thing, and to arouse Mr. Ketch another. Mr. Ketch chose to remain deaf. "I'll try the window," said Tom. "He must hear; his bed is close at hand."

He knocked sharply at the window, and it at length elicited an answer from the drowsy gentleman, composed entirely of growls and abusive words.

"Get up," called out Tom; "the keys of the cloisters are wanted."

"Then they may be wanted!" responded old Ketch in a muffled tone, as if he were speaking from the bedclothes. "I'll see you all furder afore you gets the keys from me."

"Ketch, produce the keys this instant!" interposed the master. "You know my voice—the Reverend Mr. Pye's. How dare you?"

"I'll 'dare' you all, if you don't go away!" raved old Ketch, mistaking, or pretending to mistake, the disturbers for his enemies the college boys. "It's a second edition of the trick you played me this evening, is it? I hope the days'll come when your stomachs 'll be a-starving for tripe and onions, I do. I'll go to the dean with the first blessed glimmer o' daylight——"

"Ketch! I am the headmaster. I am come for the cloister keys. There's a poor boy locked in the cloisters!"

"Is there? Praise be given up for that! I wouldn't unlock him for a mint o' diaments. If you don't be off, I'll call the perlice."

"Fire! fire!" shouted Judy in a shrill tone, putting her mouth to the keyhole, for she despaired of gaining over Ketch by any other means. "What a idiot you be, old Ketch! Do you want to be burnt up alive?"

"Fire!" shouted Tom in stentorian tones. "Fire! fire!" And Ketch, whether he was really alarmed, or whether he recognized the headmaster's voice and deemed it imprudent to hold out longer, bundled out of bed, opened the door, and appeared before them in his night attire, which was more airy than elegant. Another minute and impetuous Tom would have burst the window in.

"Beg pardon," said Ketch ungraciously to the master. "Them boys plays me up such tricks that I'm always a-thinking of 'em. Where's the fire?"

"I don't think it's anywhere," said the master. "The cloister keys, Ketch, and make haste. Which of the boys played you that trick to-night?"

Ketch gave a yell, for the point was a sore one. "I never set eyes on one of 'em! They be too cunning for me."

"Was my brother Charles one?" asked Tom, while Mr. Pye hastened away with the cloister keys

"I tell ye I never see'd one! Can't you believe?" Tom did believe, and went after the master and Judy.

They entered the cloisters and shouted out for Charles. Nothing answered them but the echoes. To *see* whether he was there was impossible. Judy thought he might be lying somewhere, insensible from fright, and she ran up and down, feeling into niches, like one demented. Mr. Pye sent Tom back to old Ketch's to get a light, which was not supplied him without difficulty.

He was turning away with it when Hamish came up. Hamish had been with all speed to Mr. Huntley's, to question Harry, as senior of the school, whether he knew what the trick of the night had been, and what boys were in it. Harry, however, who was in bed, assured Hamish of his entire ignorance. But for Mr. Huntley's veto, he would have got up and gone out to join in the search, and enjoyed it amazingly.

They carried the candle to every nook and corner of the cloisters, no result arising from it. Hamish and Tom got over and searched the burial-ground. He was not there. No signs for their keen eyes, or for any others, remained of the night's work; the college boys were cautious. A couple of matches, half burnt, lay on the ground in the north quadrangle, but they told nothing. The boys were often lighting matches, as the master knew.

"I really think you must be mistaken in supposing Charles's absence has to do with this trick played to old Ketch—whatever it may have been," he observed. "It does not appear that the boys have been in the cloisters. Had any of them been locked in here, here they would be still."

There was no denying it, and they quitted the cloisters and closed them. The keys were conveyed to Ketch, who had to get out of bed again to receive them, which he did with a great amount of wrath. Mr. Pye thought it would be proved that Charles must be at the house of one of the boys, carelessness or accident having detained him in it. And then he wished them good-night and went home.

Completely at a nonplus were they. Hamish, ever hopeful, thought Charles had perhaps returned home: and they bent their steps thither. No, no; Constance, Arthur, and curious Sarah, were all outside the street-door, looking every way. Constance was too agitated to remain still indoors. Arthur had just returned home. He had been to the houses of some of the college boys—those with whom Charles was most intimate—but could obtain no tidings of him.

Constance burst into tears. She grew excessively alarmed when Judy mentioned the doubt lest he had been shut in the cloisters. "But that fear is done away with," said Hamish. "We have searched them thoroughly. Do not distress yourself, Constance."

"There goes midnight!" exclaimed Judy.

"Ugh!" shivered Sarah. "I feel just as if somebody was walking over my grave, Miss Constance."

"If they were walking over you it mightn't be amiss," reprimanded Judith. "Don't talk such stuff as that, girl, in the young mistress's ears."

The words died away into silence, and they stood listening to the strokes of the deep-toned cathedral bell. With the last—twelve—another day had dawned upon the world. What would it bring forth for them?"

"I shall go to the police-station," said Hamish. "Constance, my dear, you had better not remain outside. Go indoors."

It was well to say "Go indoors," but in the agitation and suspense at that moment overwhelming Constance, "indoors" was not so easy to bear. Hamish strode off, Tom following him. Arthur remained with his sister, waiting and watching still.

And so they waited and watched through the livelong night. Hamish was at work; the police were at work; Tom was at work; but neither sign nor trace could be found of Charles Channing.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN OFFICIAL CEREMONY INTERRUPTED.

A GRAY dusky morning, enveloped in fog, succeeded to the fine night. Before seven o'clock—so watchful and alert are boys when mischief is agate—most of those who had been in the conspiracy were assembled and waiting round the schoolroom doors; generally they could tear up at the twelfth moment. They would not have missed the sight of Charles Channing's arrival for half a crown apiece, so curious were they to see how he looked after his fright. As it happened, it was not at any of their homes that inquiries had been made the previous night; not one of them was, to say, intimate with Charley; they were mostly older than he. Consequently they knew nothing of the search. Tod Yorke, who did know of it, had not yet arrived. Of all the king's scholars, none were marked late more frequently than Master Tod.

The senior boy had gone to the headmaster's for the keys as usual, and now came down the cloisters clanking them in his hand. "Has Charles Channing turned up?" he called out, before he was well abreast of them.

Pierce senior choked away his inclination to laughter which the sound of the name excited, and saucy Bywater answered,—

"Where should he turn up from, Huntley? Has he been swallowed?"

"Hamish Channing came to our house last night, ages after I was in bed, saying they couldn't find him," replied Huntley. "What was in the wind last night with old Calcraft?"

The boys looked at him demurely; and Huntley, getting no reply, unlocked the schoolroom and entered it. They remained behind, winking to each other, and waiting still for Charles. It wanted yet a few minutes to seven."

"I say, what d'ye think?" whispered Bywater. "After I had got our sheet smuggled in all right, and was putting it on the bed, I found two big holes burnt in it. Won't there be a commotion when my old aunt finds it out! She'll vow I have been reading in bed. That was you, Pierce senior!"

"I'm sure I never burnt it," retorted Pierce. "It was the flame did it, if anything."

"Here comes Bill Simms!" exclaimed Bywater, when their smothered laugh was over. "What has he been doing to himself? He's as white as the ghost!"

Master Bill Simms assuredly did look white. He had a pale face at the best of times, and it was embellished with straw-coloured hair. But at the present moment it had turned ghastly, and his frame seemed all of a shake as he came along.

"What on earth has taken you, Simms?" demanded Hurst.

"Oh, goodness!" uttered Simms, "I wish I was well out of this! They are saying there's a college boy drowned!"

"What?" cried the boys, gathering round him.

"There was a crowd down by the boat-house as I came along," responded Simms, as well as he could speak for his chattering teeth. "I asked a fellow what it was, and he said he didn't rightly know, but he thought one of the college boys had been found drowned in the water."

Some of the gentlemen-listeners' faces turned as pale as Master Bill Simms's—as pale as each conscience. Bywater was the first to gather courage.

"It's not obliged to be Charley Channing, if there is any one drowned."

"But it's sure to be him," chattered Simms, his teeth as crazy as his grammar. "Griffin junior says Arthur Channing went to their house last night at twelve, and said they couldn't find Charley."

The consternation into which this episode of news plunged the guilty ones it is not easy to describe. A conviction that it *was* Charles Channing who was drowned overtook them all. Schoolboys are not quite without hearts, and they would have given all they possessed, in that moment, to see Charles come flying amongst them as usual. Some of them began to wish they were without necks; for if Charles had come to an untimely end through their work, they might stand a chance of furnishing employment to the veritable Mr. Calcraft on their own score. Tod Yorke came leaping up in delight.

"Oh, wasn't it good! The young one——"

"Hold your noise, Tod! They are saying he's dead."

"Who's dead?" wondered Tod.

"Charley Channing. A college boy is found in the river drowned."

"Oh, that be hanged!" exclaimed Tod, half in mocking disbelief, half in awful fear. "It *can't be*, you know. Who says it?"

"There's seven! We must go in or Huntley will be on to us. Mind!" added Pierce senior, for he was the speaker, "we must all keep each other's counsel, and be in one tale—that we know nothing at all about it."

They slunk into school. But that the senior boy was occupied with his new duty—the calling over of the roll—he might have observed something was wrong. To play up a bit of mischief is the legitimate privilege of college boys, but to have led to a companion's death is a terror-striking affair, and their countenances betrayed that it was so.

Before the roll was finished the headmaster was in school. Tom Channing—it was late for him—entered afterwards. The master beckoned to him.

"Is Charles found?"

"No, sir. We cannot get any tidings of him at all. We have not been to bed, any of us; and the police are searching also."

Had Tom Channing come from the other side of the Boundaries, near the boat-house, perhaps he might have been able to give a different account.

The master made no comment then. He motioned Tom to his desk, and gave the word for prayers. As the boys were rising from their knees, Hamish Channing entered the school, attended by Mr. Ketch.

Hamish approached the master, who shook hands with him. Ketch remained snarling and grinning defiance at the door, shaking his fist and his old teeth covertly at the boys. If looks could blow up a room, the college school had certainly gone aloft then.

"I hear you have not found the boy?" said the master to Hamish. "It is very singular."

"We have not found him. Mr. Pye," continued Hamish gravely, "I come to demand of your courtesy an immediate investigation into the doings of the college boys last evening. That the disappearance of Charles is in some measure connected with it we cannot do otherwise than think. I have brought Ketch with me that he may tell his tale."

Ketch was marshalled forward and ordered to tell his tale, and the business of the school was suspended. Ketch told it in a distinct way enough; but he could not forbear enlarging upon his cruel disappointment over the tripe and onions, and it sent the school into convulsions. In the midst of it Tom Channing breathed freely: Ketch's preferring the complaint did away with the unpleasantness he had feared might arise through having been forced to disclose it to the master.

"I should be sorry to get displeasure visited upon any of the boys," resumed Hamish; "indeed, I should esteem it a favour, sir, if you will not punish them for any disclosure that may arise through this step which I have taken. I dare say," he added, turning his laughing gaze upon the lot, "that I should have been one of the ringleaders myself in my school days, therefore it would not be fair for me to bring punishment upon them. I only wish to know which of the school were in it, that I may make inquiries of them whether Charles was one; and if he was, what they know of his movements afterwards."

The address was fair and candid, so was Hamish's face; and some of the conspirators, in their good feeling, might have freely confessed, but for the something just whispered to them by Simms. That closed their lips.

"Do you hear?" said the master, speaking sharply—for he had rather, ten times over, that the school frankly avowed mischief, when brought to book; he was never half so severe. "Why are you silent?"

Bill Simms, who had the bump of conscientiousness very large, with a wholesome dread of consequences, besides being grievously timid, felt that he could not hold out long. "Oh, murder!" he groaned to Mark Galloway, next to whom he sat; "let's tell, and have done with it."

Mark turned cold with fear. "You're a pretty fellow!" he uttered, giving him a tremendous kick on the shins. "Would you like us all to be tried for our lives?" Which suggestion made matters worse; and Bill Simms's hair began to stand on end.

"Huntley, have you any cognizance of this?" demanded Mr. Pye.

"None, sir." And so said the three seniors under him.

"Boys!" said the master, bringing his cane down upon the desk in a manner he was accustomed to do when provoked, "I *will* come to the bottom of this business. That several of you were in it, I feel sure. Is there not *one* of you sufficiently honest to speak when required so to do?"

Certain of the boys drooped their conscious faces and their eyelids. As to Bill Simms, he felt fit to faint.

"What have you done with Charles Channing?" thundered the master. "Where have you put him? Where is he gone? I command you to speak! Let the senior of those who were in it speak, or the consequences be upon your own heads."

The threat sounded ominous in the ears of Bill Simms. He saw himself, in prospective, exposed to all the horrors of a dungeon, and to something worse. With a curious noise, something between a bark and a groan, he flung himself with his face on the floor, and lay there howling.

"Master Simms," said the master, "what has taken you? Were you the chief actor in this?"

All considerations had disappeared from Master Simms's mind save the moment's terror. He forgot what would be his own position in the school if he told, or—as they would have expressed it—turned sneak. Impelled by fear, he was hardly conscious of his words, hardly responsible for them.

"It wasn't me," he howled. "They all know I didn't want the trick played upon him. I told them that it had killed a boy down by our farm, and it might kill Channing. They know it, they do."

The master paused. "Walk here, Simms."

Simms picked himself up from the ground and walked there. A miserable object he looked—his eyes red, his teeth shaking, his face white, and his straw hair standing on end.

The master leaned his arms upon his desk, and brought his face nearly into contact with the frightened one. "What trick did you play upon Charles Channing?"

"'Twasn't me, sir," sobbed Simms. "I didn't want it done, I say. O-o-o-o-o-o-h! I didn't! I didn't!"

"What trick *was* played upon him?"

"It was a ghost dressed up to frighten him, and he passed through the cloisters and saw it. It wasn't me! I'll never speak again if it was me!"

"A ghost!" repeated the master in astonishment, while Ketch stretched his old neck forward, and the most intense interest was displayed by the school.

"They did it with a sheet and a blue flame," went on Simms, who, now that the ice was broken, tried to make a clean breast of it, and grew more alarmed every moment. "It wasn't me! I didn't want it done, and I never lent a hand to the dressing-up. If little Channing *is* dead, it won't be fair to hang me."

"Who was in the plot?" was the next question of the master. And Simms enumerated them. The master, stern and grim, beckoned to the several gentlemen to walk up, and to range themselves before him. "The lad has run some distance in his terror," observed the master aside to Hamish, as he remembered what Judith had told him the previous night. "You will see him home in the course of the day."

"I trust we may!" replied Hamish, with marked emphasis.

Bit by bit, word by word, the master drew the whole truth from the downcast lads. Pierce senior looked dogged and obstinate; he was inwardly vowing unheard-of revenge against Master Simms. Probably most of them were doing the same.

"I knowed it was them! I knowed it couldn't be nobody but them!" broke forth old Ketch, summarily interrupting the proceedings. "You sees now, sir, what a incorrigible——"

"Silence!" said the master, raising his hand. "I can deal with this without your assistance, Ketch.—Hurst, who concocted this infamous plot?"

Hurst—who was the senior of the conspirators with regard to his position in the school, though not so old as Pierce senior—could not answer it definitely. It was concocted between them, he said—not by one more than by another.

"Did you not know that a trick such as this has deprived *men* of reason?" continued the master. "And you play it upon a young and defenceless boy! I am at a loss how to express my sense of your conduct. If any ill shall have happened to him through it, you will carry it on your consciences for ever."

Remembering what they had just heard, the boys' consciences had begun to twitch already.

"Who personated the ghost?" continued the master.

"Pierce senior." The answer came from Simms. The others would not have given it.

"I might have guessed that," was the remark of the master, who had no great love for the gentleman named. "I might have known that if there was a boy in the college school who would delight to put himself forward to trample on one younger and more sensitive than himself, it would be Pierce senior. I'll give you something to remember this work, Master Pierce.—Yorke!"

Gerald Yorke knew what he was called for. He was the tallest and strongest of all. The school knew; and a murmur of excitement went round. Pierce senior was going to be hoisted.

Only in very flagrant cases was the extreme punishment of flogging resorted to by the present master. It had been more common with his predecessor. Of course its rarity made it all the more impressive when it did come

"Make ready," said the master to Pierce senior, unlocking his desk and taking out a birch as big as a whole besom.

Pierce turned green and white without help from any blue flame, and slowly began to obey. There might be no resistance. The school hushed itself into suspense, and Mr. Ketch's legs were on the point of taking a dance of ecstasy. A minute or two, and the group formed the centre of the upper part of the room, Yorke supporting the great boy whose back was bared, while the daunted faces and eager eyes were strained eagerly from around. The headmaster took his place, and his birch was raised in the air to come down with a heavy stroke, when a commotion was heard at one of the desks, and Stephen Bywater rushed forward.

"Stop, sir!" he said to the master. "If you will let Pierce go, I will take the punishment."

The master's arm with its weapon of war dropped powerless by his side, and he turned his astonished gaze upon Bywater.

"I had more to do with planning the trick than Pierce had, sir, so it's only just that I should be the scapegoat. We fixed upon Pierce to personate the ghost because he was tall and lanky. And a flogging is not much to my skin," added honest, impudent Bywater.

"So *you* were the planner of it, were you, Master Bywater?" demanded the angry master.

"In a great measure I was, sir. If I do go in for mischief, it shall not be said I let others suffer for it. Little Channing had offended me, and I wished to serve him out. But I never thought to do him harm."

In the perplexity of deciding what he ought to do when official proceedings were interrupted in this unprecedented way, the master hesitated. What he would have done is uncertain — flogged Pierce first, and Bywater afterwards perhaps—but at that moment there occurred another interruption, and a more serious one.

Diggs, the man who lived at the boat-house, had entered the school, and was asking to speak to the headmaster. Catching sight of the signs of the ceremony about to be performed, he waited for no permission, but went forward at once, a college cap in his hand, and his voice trembling with excitement. Its excitement was not lessened when he recognized Hamish Channing.

"I am the bearer of bad news, gentlemen," he said, addressing them both. "I fear one of the young college lads was drowned last night by my boat-house. We have picked up his cap this morning. It was poor little Master Channing."

Hamish controlled his emotion better than did the Reverend Mr. Pye. The latter turned his eyes on the horrified school, himself equally horrified, and then signified to Pierce senior to dress himself—to Bywater to retire to his place. "The affair has become serious," he observed, "and must be dealt with differently. Poor child! Poor little Channing!"

And the boys in their emotion broke into an echoing wail—"Poor little Channing! poor little Channing!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

DRAGGING THE RIVER.

THE wailing echoes of lamentation were dying out in the high roof of the college school. Hamish Channing, pale, but calm and self-controlled, stood perfectly ready to investigate the account brought by the boat-house keeper of the drowning of Charles. The feelings of those who had had a hand in the work may be imagined, perhaps, but certainly cannot be described. Bill Simms choked and sobbed, and pulled his lanky straw hair, and kicked his legs about, and was altogether beside himself. The under-masters looked on with stern countenances and lowering brows; while old Ketch never had such a disappointment in all his life (the one grand disappointment of the previous night's supper excepted) as he was feeling now at the deferred flogging.

Diggs, the boat-house keeper, was a widower, with one child, a girl of ten years old. His mother lived with him—an aged woman, confined to her bed of late with rheumatic fever, from which she was slowly recovering. On the previous night Diggs was out, and the girl had been sent on an errand, Mrs. Diggs being left in the house alone. She was lying quietly, still as was the air outside, when sudden sounds broke that stillness and smote upon her ear. Footsteps—young steps they seemed—were heard to come tearing down on the outside gravel from the direction of the cathedral, and descend the steps. Then there was a plunge into the river and a startling cry.

The old woman echoed the cry; but there was none to hear it, and she was powerless to aid. That a human soul was struggling in the water was certain; and she called and called, but called in vain. She was shut up in the house, unable to move, and there were none outside to hear her. In her grief and distress she at length pulled the bedclothes over her ears, that she might hear no more (if it was to be heard) of the death agony.

Twenty minutes or so, and then the girl came in. The old woman took her head from underneath the clothes, and stated what had occurred, and the girl went and looked at the river. But it was flowing along peacefully, showing no signs of anything of the sort having happened. Not a creature was on the path on either side, so far as her eyes could reach in the moonlight; and she came to the conclusion that her grandmother must have been mistaken. "She do have odd fancies," said the child to herself, "and thinks she hears things that nobody else never hears."

At ten o'clock Diggs came home. Now this man had a propensity to yield to an infirmity to which many, many others also yield—that of drinking too freely. It is true this did not often occur; but when it did happen, it was usually at a time when his services were especially required. It is very much the same in this world: we are apt to do things, whether good ones or bad ones, just at the wrong moment. Diggs arrived at home stupid. His old mother called him to her room, and told him what she had heard; but she could make little impression upon him. As his young daughter had done, he took a survey of the river, he taking it only from the windows of his house—the girl had gone on to the bank—and then he tumbled into bed and slept heavily until the morning.

Up betimes, he remembered what had been told to him, and went out of doors, half expecting possibly to see some corpse floating on the surface. "I was detained out last night on an errand," explained he to some three or four stragglers who had gathered round him, "and when I got in my old mother told me a cock-and-bull story of a cry and a splash, as if somebody had fell into the river. It don't look much like it, though."

"A dead dog, may be," suggested one of the idlers. "They be always a-throwing rubbish into this river on the sly."

"Who is?" sharply asked Diggs. "They had better let me catch 'em at it!"

"Lots of folks is," was the response. "But if it was a dead dog, it couldn't well have cried out."

Diggs went indoors to his mother's chamber. "What time was it, this tale of yours?" asked he.

"It was about half-past seven," she answered. "The half-hour chimed out from the college just afore or just after; I forget which." And then she related again what she knew he could not clearly comprehend overnight—the fact of the fleet-sounding footsteps, and that they appeared to be young footsteps. "If I didn't know the cloisters to be shut at that hour, I should ha' thought they come direct from the west door——"

The words were interrupted by a calling from below, and the man hastened down. A boy's cap—known from its form to belong to one of the collegiate scholars—had just been found under the lower bank, lodged in the mud. Then somebody *had* been drowned! and it was a college boy.

Where does a crowd collect from? I don't believe anybody can tell; but that we can't see their descent, it might be supposed they dropped from the skies. Not three minutes after that trencher was picked up the people were gathering thick and threefold, retired though the spot was; and it was at this time that Master Bill Simms had passed and heard the tale which turned his heart sick and his face white.

Some time given to supposition, to comments, and to other gossip indigenous to an event of the sort, and then Mr. Diggs started for the college school with the cap. Another messenger ran to the Channings' house, the name in the cap showing to whom it had belonged. Diggs related the substance of this to the master, suppressing certain little points bearing upon himself.

Mr. Pye took the cap in his hand and looked inside. The name, "C. Channing," was in Mrs. Channing's writing; and in the sprawling hand of one of the schoolboys—it looked like Bywater's—"Miss" had been added. Charley had scratched the addition over with strokes from a pen, but the word was distinct still.

"The river must be dragged, Diggs," said Hamish Channing.

"The drags are being got ready now, sir. They'll be in by the time I get back."

Hamish strode to the door. Tom came up from his desk, showing some agitation, and looked at the master. "You will allow me to go, sir? I can do no good at my lessons in this suspense."

"Yes," replied the master. He was going himself.

The school rose with one accord. The under-masters rose. To think of study, in this excitement, was futile; and in defiance of all precedent, the boys were allowed to quit the room and troop down to the river. It was a race which should get there first; masters and boys ran together. The only one who walked pretty soberly was the headmaster. He had to uphold his dignity.

The drags were already in the river, and the banks were lined; police, friends, spectators, gentlemen, mob, and college boys jostled each other. Arthur Channing, pale and agitated, came running from his home. The old vergers and bedesmen came; some of the clergy came; Judy came; and the dean came. Hamish, outwardly self-possessed, and giving his orders with quiet authority, was inwardly troubled as he had never been. The boy had been left to his charge, and how should he answer for this to his father and mother?

He went in and saw the old woman, as did the renowned Mr. Butterby, who had appeared with the rest. She related to them succinctly what she had heard on the previous night. "I could ha' told, without having heard it now, that it was the steps of a college boy," she said. "I don't listen so often to 'em that I need mistake. He seemed to be coming from the west door o' the cloisters—only that the cloisters be shut at night; so he may have come round by the front o' the college. Desperate quick he ran, and leaped down the steps; and a minute after there was the splash and the cry, and the footsteps were heard no more. One might fancy that, in turning the corner to run along the towing-path, he had turned too quick, and so fell over the bank."

"Did you hear no noise afterwards?" questioned Hamish.

"I didn't. I called out, but nobody came a-nigh to answer it; and then I hid my ears. I was afraid, ye see."

They left the old woman's bedside and returned to the crowd on the bank. The dean quietly questioned Hamish about the facts, and shook his head when put in possession of them. "I fear there is little hope," he said.

"Very little. My father and mother's absence makes it the more distressing. I know not, Mr. Dean, how——"

Who was this pushing vehemently up, to the discomfiture of everybody, elbowing the dean with as little ceremony as he might have elbowed Ketch, thrusting aside Hamish, and looking down on the river with flashing eyes, with working nostrils? Who should it be but Roland Yorke; for that was his usual way of pushing through a crowd, as you have heard before.

"Is it true?" he gasped. "Is Charles Channing in the water?—sent there through the tricks of the college boys—of Tod?"

"There is little doubt of its truth, Roland," was the answer of Hamish.

Roland said no more. Off went his coat, off went his waistcoat, off went other garments, leaving him nothing but his drawers and his shirt; and in he leaped impetuously, before anybody could stop him, and floundered away in the water, looking after Charles, paying no heed to the shouts that the drags would get hold of his legs.

* * * * *

But neither drags nor Roland could find Charles. The drags were continued in use, but there was no result. Very few had expected that there would be any result, the probability being that the current had carried the body down the stream. Hamish had been home to soothe the grief of his sisters—or rather to essay at soothing it—and then he came back again.

Roland, his ardour cooled, had likewise been home to exchange his wet things for dry ones. This done, he was flying out again, when he came upon the Reverend William Yorke, who was hastening down to the scene in some agitation.

"Is the boy found, Roland, do you know? How did it happen? Did he fall in?"

"Considering the light in which you regard the family, William Yorke, I wonder you should waste your breath to ask about it," was Roland's touchy answer, delivered with as much scorn as he could call up.

Mr. Yorke said no more, only quickened his pace towards the river. Roland kept up with him and continued talking.

"It's a good thing all the world's not of your opinion, William Yorke! You thought to put a slight upon Constance Channing when you told her she might go along.

for you. It has turned out just the best luck that could have happened to her."

"Be silent, sir," said Mr. Yorke, his pale cheek flushing scarlet. "I have already told you that I will not permit you to use Miss Channing's name to me. You have nothing to do with her or with me."

"*You* have nothing to do with her at any rate," cried aggravating Roland. "She'll soon belong to your betters, William Yorke."

Mr. Yorke turned his flashing eyes upon him, plainly asking the explanation that he would not condescend to ask in words. It gave Roland an advantage, and he went on swimmingly with his mischief.

"Lord Carrick has seen the merits of Constance, if you have not; and—I don't mind telling it you in confidence—has resolved to make her his wife. He says she's the prettiest girl he has seen for ages."

"It is not true," said Mr. Yorke haughtily.

"Not true!" returned Roland. "You'll see whether it's true or not when she's Countess of Carrick. Lady Augusta was present when he made her the offer. He was half afraid to make it for some time, he told us, as he was getting on in years, and had gray hairs. Halloa! you are turning yellow, William Yorke. She *can't* be anything to you! You threw her away, you know."

William Yorke, vouchsafing no reply, got away from his tormentor. He probably did look yellow; certainly he felt so. Roland indulged in a quiet laugh. He had been waiting for this opportunity ever since he became cognizant of what had taken place between the earl and Constance. The earl had made no secret of his intention and its defeat. "I'll have some fun over it with Mr. William," had been Roland's thought.

A sudden noise! Cries and shouts on the banks of the river, and the dense crowd swayed about with excitement. Mr. Yorke and Roland set off to run, each from his different point, and the cries took a distinct sound as they neared them.

"They have found the body!"

It was being then laid upon the bank. Those who could get near tried to obtain a glimpse of it. The college boys, with white faces and terror-stricken consciences, fought for a place; Roland Yorke fought for it; the headmaster fought for it; I am not sure that the bishop—who had seen the commotion from his palace windows, and came up to know what it meant—did not fight for it.

A false alarm, so far as the present object was concerned! A little lad who had been drowned more than a week before had turned up now. He had incautiously climbed on the parapet of the bridge, whence he fell into the water, and their search for him had hitherto been fruitless He was not a pleasant sight to look upon as he lay there; but the relief to certain of the college boys when they found it was not Charles was immeasurable. Bywater's spirits went up to some of their old impudence heat. "In looking for one thing you find another," quoth he.

Very true, Mr. Bywater! Sometimes we find more than we bargain for. The drags were thrown in again, and the excited crowd jostled each other as before, their faces hanging over the brink. Hush! Hark! Another prize! What is it coming up now?

A rare prize this time! The drags pulled and tugged, and the men cried, "Heave-ho!" and the hundred and one voices echoed it: "Heave-ho! heave-ho!" Hush! hush—sh—sh! A breathless minute of suspense, and up it comes. Amid straw and tangled weeds and mud, and the odds and ends that a river's waters will collect, something hard and clanking was thrown upon the bank, and wondering eyes and faces peered over it.

Nothing but a pair of keys—a pair of large rusty keys, tied together by a string! Bywater, and Hurst, and young Galloway, and one or two more, cast significant glances together, and were nearly choking with fright and suppressed laughter. One standing there, conspicuous for his dress, which among other items comprised an apron, turned a significant glance on *them*. Bold Bywater met it, and looked a little less bold than usual. But the prelate had kept counsel, and meant to keep it, and he looked away again.

Once more were the drags thrown into the water. Once more the mob, gentle and simple, hustled on its brink. When the college bell tolled out for morning prayers, those whose duty it was to attend the cathedral drew themselves away unwillingly. Arthur Channing was one. Whatever might be his grief, his suspense, obligations must be fulfilled.

Later in the day, when the search was over—for it was deemed useless to continue it—and when hope was over, a council was held at Mr. Channing's house. Mr. and Mrs. Channing must be acquainted with this sad business; but how was it to be done? By letter, by telegraph, or by a special messenger? Constance had suggested writing, and silently hoped that Hamish would take the task upon himself, for she felt nearly unequal to it in her dire distress. Mr. Galloway, who had been in and out all the morning, suggested the telegraph. Hamish approved of neither, but proposed to dispatch Arthur to make the communication in person.

"I cannot leave Helstonleigh myself," he said; "therefore it must devolve upon Arthur. Of course his journey will be an expense; but there are times when expense must not be regarded. I consider this one."

"A letter would go quicker," said Mr. Galloway.

"Scarcely, in these days of fast travelling," was the reply of Hamish. "But that is not the question. A letter, let it be ever so explanatory, will only put them in suspense. As soon as they have read it, five hundred questions will suggest themselves that they will wish to ask; and to wait to have them satisfied will be intolerable, especially to my mother. Arthur's going will obviate this. He knows as much as we know, and can impart his knowledge to them."

"There is a great deal in what you say," mused Mr Galloway.

"I am sure there is," spoke Constance through her tears, "though it did not strike me previously. In mamma's anxiety and suspense, she might start for home to learn details."

"And I think it is what she would do," said Hamish, "if not my father also. It will be better that Arthur should go. He can tell them all they would learn if they came home; and, so far as it can be, that would be satisfactory."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Huntley and his daughter. Ellen had begged her father, when she found he was going to the Channings', to allow her to accompany him and see Constance in her distress. Mr. Huntley readily acquiesced. The drowning of poor Charley was a serious affliction, in contemplation of which he forgot the ineligibility of her meeting Hamish.

Hamish did not appear to perceive any ineligibility in the matter. He was the first to take Ellen's hand in his and bend upon her his sweet smile of welcome. Knowing what Ellen did know of Mr. Huntley's sentiments, and that he was looking on, it rendered her manner confused and her cheeks crimson. She was glad to turn to Constance and strive to say a few words of sympathy. "Had Harry been one of those wicked, thoughtless boys to join in this ghost trick, I could never have forgiven him!" she impulsively exclaimed, the hot tears running down her cheeks.

The subject under consideration was referred to Mr. Huntley, and his opinion requested, more as a form of courtesy than anything, for Hamish had made up his mind upon the point. A thoroughly affectionate, dutiful son was Hamish Channing; and he believed that the tidings could be rendered more bearable to his father and mother by a messenger being sent than they could be by any other mode of communication. The excuse that Constance and Arthur had throughout found for Hamish in their hearts was that he had taken the bank-note out of latent affection to Mr. and Mrs. Channing.

"You are wrong, every one of you," said Mr. Huntley, when he had listened to what they had to say. "You must send neither letter nor messenger. It will not do."

Hamish looked at him. "Then what can we send, sir?"

"Don't send at all."

"Not send at all!" repeated Hamish.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Huntley. "You have no positive proof yet that the child is dead. It will be alarming them unnecessarily."

"Mr. Huntley!" said Constance. "Is it possible that you see grounds for hope?"

"Honestly, to confess it, my dear, I do not see much ground for hope," he replied. "But, on the other hand, there are no positive grounds for despair. So long as you have not these grounds furnished, I say, keep it from Mr. and Mrs. Channing. Answer me one thing—What good end would it serve, the telling them?"

"Is it not a duty?"

"I do not see it," said Mr. Huntley. "Were the poor boy's fate known beyond uncertainty, it would be a different matter. If you send and tell them all there is to tell, what would come of it? The very suspense, the doubt, would have a bad effect. It might bring Mr. Channing home; and the good already effected might be driven back again—his time, his purse, his hopes, that he has given to the journey, wasted. Allowing that he still remained, the news might check his cure. No; my strong advice to you is, suffer them for the present to remain in ignorance."

Hamish began to think Mr. Huntley might be right.

"I know I am right," said Mr. Huntley. "If the putting them in possession of the facts could be productive of any benefit to themselves, to you, or to Charles, I'd go off myself with Arthur this hour. But it could effect nothing, and to them it might result in ill. Until we know something more certain ourselves, let us keep it from them."

"Yes, I see it," said Hamish warmly. "It will be best so."

Constance felt her arm touched, and coloured with emotion when she found it was done by the Reverend Mr. Yorke. In this day of distress people seemed to come in and go out without ceremony. Mr. Yorke had entered with Tom Channing. He entirely took up the new view of the matter, and strongly advised that it should not be allowed to reach Mr. and Mrs. Channing.

Mr. Galloway, when he was departing, beckoned Constance into the hall. It was only to give her a private word of friendly sympathy or advice—not to be overwhelmed, to cling to hope. She thanked him, but it was with an aching heart, for Constance could not feel this hope.

"Will you grant me the favour of a minute's private interview?" asked Mr. Yorke stiffly, meeting her in the hall.

Constance hesitated for a moment. He was asking what she felt he had no right to ask. She coloured, bowed, and stepped towards the drawing-room. Mr. Yorke threw open the door for her and followed her in.

Then he became agitated. Whatever his pride or his temper may have been, whether the parting between them was his fault or Constance's, it was certain that he loved her with an enduring love. Until that morning he had never contemplated the losing Constance: he had surely looked forward to some indefinite future when she should be his; and the words spoken by Roland had well-nigh driven him mad, which was precisely what Mr. Roland hoped they would do.

"I would not speak to you on this day, when you are in distress, when you may deem it an unfitting time for me to speak," he began, "but I *cannot* live in this suspense. Let me confess that what brought me here was to obtain this interview with you quite as much as this other unhappy business. You will forgive my speaking to-day."

"Mr. Yorke, I do not know what you can have to speak of," she answered, with dignity. "My distress is great, but I can hear what you wish to say."

"I heard—I heard"—he spoke with emotion, and went plunging abruptly into his subject—"I heard this morning that Lord Carrick was soliciting you to become his wife."

Constance could have laughed, but for her own distress, agitated though he was. "Well, sir?" she coldly said in a little spirit of mischief.

"Constance, you cannot do it," he passionately retorted —"you cannot so perjure yourself!"

"Mr. Yorke, have you the right to tell me I shall or shall not marry Lord Carrick?"

"You can't do it, Constance!" he repeated, laying his hand upon her shoulder and speaking hoarsely. "You know that your whole affection was given to me! It is mine still; I feel it is. You have not transferred it to another in this short time. You do not love and forget so lightly."

"Is this all you have to say to me?"

"No, it is not all," he answered, with emotion. "I want you to be *my* wife, Constance, not his. I want you to forget this miserable estrangement that has come between us, and come home to me at Hazeldon."

"Listen, Mr. Yorke," she said; but it was with the utmost difficulty she retained her indifferent manner and kept her tears from falling: she would have liked to be taken then to his sheltering arms, never to have quitted them. "The cause which led to our parting was that suspicion that fell upon Arthur, coupled with something that you were not pleased with in my own manner relating to it. That suspicion is upon him still; and my course of conduct would be precisely the same were it to come over again. I am sorry you should have reaped up this matter, for it can only end as it did before."

"Will you not marry me?" he resumed.

"No, so long as circumstances look dark on my brother."

"Constance, that may be for ever!"

"Yes," she sadly answered, knowing what she did know; "they may never be brighter than they are now. Were I tempted to become your wife, you might reproach me afterwards for allying you to disgrace; and that, I think, would kill me. I *beg* you not to speak of this again."

"And you refuse me for Lord Carrick! You will go and marry him!" exclaimed Mr. Yorke, struggling between reproach, affection, and temper.

"You must allow me to repeat that you have no right to question me," she said, moving to the door. "When our engagement was forfeited, that right was forfeited with it."

She opened the door to quit the room. Mr. Yorke might have wished further to detain her, but Judy came bustling up. "Lady Augusta's here, Miss Constance."

Lady Augusta Yorke met Constance in the hall, seizing both her hands. "I had a bad headache and lay in bed, and never heard of it till an hour ago!" she uttered, with the same sort of impulsive kindness that sometimes actuated Roland. "Is it true that he is drowned? Is it true that Tod was in it? Gerald says he was.—William, are *you* here?"

Constance took Lady Augusta into the general sitting room, into the presence of the rest of her guests. Lady Augusta asked a hundred questions at the least, and they made her acquainted with the different points so far as they were cognizant of them. She declared that Tod should be kept upon bread and water for a week, and she would go to the school and request Mr. Pye to flog him. She overwhelmed Constance with kindness, wishing she and Annabel would come to her house and remain entirely for a few days. Constance thanked her, and found some difficulty in being allowed to refuse.

"Here is his exercise-book," observed Constance, the tears filling her eyes; "here is the very place where he laid his pen. Every other minute I think it cannot be true that he is gone—that it must be all a dream."

Lady Augusta took up the pen and kissed it: it was her way of showing sympathy. Mr. Huntley smiled. "Where's William gone?" asked Lady Augusta.

The Reverend William Yorke had quitted the house, shaking the dust from his shoes in anger as he crossed the threshold—anger as much at himself for having ever given her up as at Constance Channing, and still most at the Right Honourable the Earl of Carrick

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. JENKINS IN A DILEMMA.

I DON'T know what you will say to me for introducing you into the privacy of Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins's bedchamber, but it is really necessary. We cannot very well get along without it.

A conjugal dispute had occurred that morning when Mrs. Jenkins got up. She was an early riser, as was Jenkins also in a general way; but since his illness he had barely contrived to get down in time for breakfast. On this morning—which was not the one following the application of mustard to his chest, but one about a week subsequent to that medicinal operation—Mrs. Jenkins, upon preparing to descend, peremptorily ordered him to remain in bed. Nothing need be recorded of the past week save two facts: Charles Channing had not been discovered, either in life or in death; and the Earl of Carrick had terminated his visit and left Helstonleigh.

"I'll bring your breakfast up," said Mrs. Jenkins.

"It is of no use to say that," Jenkins ventured meekly to remonstrate. "You know I must get up."

"I say you shall not get up. Here you are, growing weaker and worse every day, and yet you won't take care of yourself! Where's the use of your taking a bottle a day of cough mixture? where's the use of your making the market scarce of cod-liver oil? where's the use of wasting good mustard, if it's all to do you no good? *Does* it do you any good?"

"I am afraid it has not as yet," confessed Jenkins.

"And never will, so long as you give your body and brains no rest. Out you go by nine o'clock in all weathers, ill or well; and there you are at your business till evening, stooping yourself double over the writing, dancing abroad on errands, wearing out your lungs with answering callers! There's no common sense in it."

"But, my dear, the office must be attended to," said Jenkins, with much deference.

"There's no 'must' in the case as far as you are concerned. If I say you shan't go to it, why, you shan't. What's the office, pray, in comparison with a man's life?"

"But I am not so ill as to remain away. I can go yet and do my work."

"You'd be for going if you were in your coffin, you would!" was Mrs. Jenkins's wrathful answer. "Could you do any good then, pray?"

"But I am not in my coffin," mildly suggested Jenkins.

"Don't I say you'd be for going if you were?" reiterated Mrs. Jenkins, who sometimes, in her heat, lost sight of the precise point under dispute. "You know you would; you know I have told you so before; you know there's nothing in the whole world that you think of but that office! Office, office, office it is with you from morning till night. When you *are* in your coffin through it you'll be satisfied."

"But it is my duty to go as long as I can, my dear."

"It's my duty to do a good many things that I don't do!" was the answer; "and one of my duties which I haven't done yet is to keep you indoors for a bit and nurse you up. I shall begin it from to-day, and see if I can't get you well that way."

"But——"

"Hold your tongue, Jenkins. I never say a thing but you are sure to put in a 'but.' You lie in bed this morning—do you hear?—and I'll bring up your breakfast."

Mrs. Jenkins quitted the room with the last order, and that ended the discussion. Had Jenkins been a free agent—free from business obligations—he had been only too glad to obey her. In his present state of health the work of the office had become almost too much for him; it was with difficulty that he went to it and did his duty there. Even the walk, short as it was, in the early morning, was nearly beyond his strength; even the rising betimes was beginning to tell upon him. And though he had little hope that nursing himself up indoors would prove of essential service, he felt that the *rest* it brought would be to him an inestimable boon.

But Jenkins was one who thought of duty before he thought of himself; and, therefore, to remain away from the office, if he *could* drag himself to it, appeared to him little less than a sin. He was paid for his time and services,—fairly paid—liberally paid, some might have said,—and they belonged to his master. But it was not so much from this point of view that Jenkins regarded the necessity of going, conscientious though he was, as at the thought of what the office would do without him, there being nobody to replace him but Roland Yorke. Jenkins knew what he was, and so do we.

To lie in bed or remain indoors under these circumstances Jenkins felt to be impossible ; and when his watch gave him warning that the breakfast hour was approaching, up he got. Behold him sitting on the side of the bed, essaying to dress himself—*essaying* to do it. Never had Jenkins felt feebler, or weaker, or less able to cope with his increasing illness, than on this morning ; and when Mrs. Jenkins dashed in—for her quick ears had caught, downstairs, the sounds of his stirring—he sat there still, stockings in hand, unable to help himself.

"So you were going to trick me, were you ? Are you not ashamed of yourself, Jenkins ?"

Jenkins gasped twice before he could reply. A giddiness seemed to be stealing over him, as it had done that other evening underneath the elm trees. "My dear, it is of no use your talking. I *must* go to the office," he gasped out.

"You shan't go—if I lock you up ! There !"

Jenkins was spared the trouble of a reply. The giddiness had increased to faintness, his sight left him, and he fell back on the bed in a state of unconsciousness. Mrs. Jenkins rather regarded it as a triumph. She pushed him into bed and tucked him up.

"This comes of your attempting to disobey me," said she, when he came round again. "I wonder what would become of you poor, soft mortals of men if you were let have your own way ! There's no office for you to-day, Jenkins."

Very peremptorily spoke she. But lest he should attempt the same again, she determined to put it out of his power. Opening a closet, she thrust every article of his clothing into it, not leaving him so much as a waistcoat, turned the key, and put it into her pocket, poor Jenkins watching her with despairing eyes, and not venturing to remonstrate.

"There," said she, speaking amiably in her glow of satisfaction, "you can go to the office now, if you like. I'll not stop you ; but you'll have to march through the streets leaving your clothes in that closet."

Under these difficulties Jenkins did not entirely see his way clear to get there. Mrs. Jenkins went instead, catching Mr. Roland Yorke just upon his arrival.

"What's up that Jenkins is not here ?" began free Roland before she could speak.

"Jenkins is not in a fit state to get out of his bed, and I have come to tell Mr. Galloway so," replied she.

Roland Yorke's face grew to twice its usual length at the news. "I say, though, that will never do, Mrs. Jenkins! What's to become of this office?"

"The office must do the best it can without him. *He's* not coming to it."

"*I* can't manage it," said Roland in considerable consternation. "I should go dead if I had to do Jenkins's work and my own as well."

"He'll go dead unless he takes some rest in time and gets a little good nursing. I should like to know how I am to nurse him if he's down here all day?"

"That's not the question," returned Roland, feeling uncommonly blank. "The question is, how the office, and I, and Galloway are to get along without him? Couldn't he come in a sedan?"

"Yes, he can, if he likes to come without his clothes," retorted Mrs. Jenkins. "I have taken care to lock *them* up."

"Locked his clothes up!" repeated Roland in wonder. "What's that for?"

"Because as long as he has got a bit of life in him he'll use it to drag himself down here," answered Mrs. Jenkins tartly. "That's why. He was getting up to come this morning, defying me and every word I said to him against it, when he fell down on the bed in a fainting fit. I thought it time to lock his things up then."

"Upon my word, I don't know what's to be done," resumed Roland, growing quite hot with dismay and perplexity at the prospect of some extra work for himself. "Look here!" exhibiting the parchments on Jenkins's desk, all so neatly left; "here's an array! Jenkins did not intend to stay away when he left these last night, I know."

"*He* intend to stay away! Catch him thinking of it," retorted Mrs. Jenkins. "It is as I have just told him—that he'd come in his coffin. And it's my firm belief that if he knew a week's holiday would save him from his coffin, he'd not take it unless I was at his back to make him. It's well he has got somebody to look after him that's not quite deficient of common sense!"

"Well, this is a plague!" grumbled Roland.

"So it is—for me, I know, if for nobody else," was Mrs. Jenkins's reply. "But there's some plagues in the world that we must put up with and make the best of, whether we like 'em or not; and this is one. You'll tell Mr. Galloway, please; it will save me waiting."

However, as Mrs. Jenkins was departing she encountered Mr. Galloway, and told him herself. He was both vexed and grieved to hear it—grieved on Jenkins's score, vexed on his own. That Jenkins was growing very ill he believed from his own observation, and it could not have happened at a more untoward time. Involuntarily Mr. Galloway's thoughts turned to Arthur Channing, and he wished he had him in the office still

"You must turn over a new leaf from this very hour, Roland Yorke," he observed to that gentleman when he entered. "We must both of us buckle-to if we are to get through the work."

"It's not possible, sir, that I can do Jenkins's share and mine," said Roland.

"If you only do Jenkins's, I'll do yours," replied Mr. Galloway significantly. "Understand me, Roland: I shall expect you to show yourself equal to this emergency. Put aside frivolity and idleness, and apply yourself in earnest. Jenkins has been in the habit of taking part of your work upon himself, like, I believe, no clerk living would have done; and in return you must now take his. I hope in a few days he may be with us again. Poor fellow, we shall find his loss!"

Mr. Galloway had to go out in the course of the morning, and Roland was left alone to the cares and work of the office. It occurred to him that as a preliminary step he could not do better than put the window open, that the sight of people passing (especially any of his acquaintance with whom he might exchange greetings) should cheer him on at his hard work. Accordingly, he threw it up to its utmost extent, and went on with his writing, giving alternately one look to his task and two to the street. Not many minutes had he been thus spurring on his industry when he saw Arthur Channing pass.

"Hist—st—st!" called out Roland, by way of attracting his attention. "Come in, old fellow, will you? Here's such a game!"

CHAPTER XLV.

A NEW SUSPICION.

ARTHUR CHANNING had been walking leisurely down Close Street. His time hung heavily on his hands. In quitting the cathedral after morning service he had joined Mr. Harper, the lay clerk, and went with him, talking, towards the town, partly because he had nothing to do elsewhere, partly because out of doors appeared more desirable than home. In the uncertain state of suspense they were kept in respecting Charles, the minds of all, from Hamish down to Annabel, were in a constant state of unrest. When they rose in the morning the first thought was, "Shall we hear of Charles to-day?" When they retired at bedtime it was, "What may not the river give up this night?" It appeared to themselves that they were continually expecting tidings of some sort or other, and with this expectation hope would sometimes be mingled. Hope! Where could it spring from? The only faint suspicion of it, indulged at first, that Charley had been rescued in some providential manner and conveyed to a house of shelter, had had time to die out. A few houses there were, half-concealed near the river, like there are near most other rivers of traffic, which the police trusted just as far as they could see, and whose inmates did not boast of shining reputations; but the police had overhauled these thoroughly, and found no trace of Charley. Nor was it likely that they would conceal a child. So long as Charles's positive fate remained a mystery, suspense could not cease; and with this suspense there did mingle some faint glimmer of hope. Suspense urges to exertion; inaction is intolerable to it. Hamish, Arthur, Tom—all would rather be out of doors now than in; there might be something to be heard of, some information to be met, and the looking after it was better than the staying at home to wait for it. No wonder, then, that Arthur Channing's steps would bend of their own accord towards the town, when he left the cathedral morning and afternoon.

It was in passing Mr. Galloway's office, the window of which stood wide open, that Arthur had found himself called to by Roland Yorke.

"What is it?" he asked, halting at the window.

"You are the very chap I wanted to see," cried out

Roland. "Come in! Don't be afraid of meeting Galloway; he's off somewhere."

The prospect of meeting Mr. Galloway would not have prevented Arthur from entering. He was conscious of no wrong, and he did not shrink as though he had committed it. He went in, and Mr. Harper proceeded on his way.

"Here's a go!" was Roland's salutation. "Jenkins is laid up."

It was nothing but what Arthur had expected. He, like Mr. Galloway, had observed Jenkins growing ill and more ill. "How shall you manage without him?" asked Arthur, Mr. Galloway's dilemma being the first thing that occurred to his mind.

"Who's to know?" answered Roland, who was in an explosive temper. "*I* don't. If Galloway thinks to put it all on my back, it's a scandalous shame. I never could do it, or the half of it. Jenkins worked like a horse when we were busy. He'd hang his head down over his desk, and never lift it for two hours at a stretch—you know he would not. Fancy my doing that! I should get brain fever before a week was out."

Arthur smiled at this. "Is Jenkins much worse?" he inquired.

"I don't believe he's worse at all," returned Roland tartly. "He'd have come this morning as usual, fast enough, only she locked up his clothes."

"Who?" said Arthur in surprise.

"She. That agreeable lady who has the felicity of owning Jenkins. She was here this morning as large as life, giving an account of her doings, without a blush. She locked up his things, she says, to keep him in bed. I'd trick her, I know, were I Jenkins. I'd put on her flounces, but what I'd come out, if I wanted to. Rather short they'd be for him."

"I shall go, Roland. My being here only hinders you."

"As if that made any difference worth counting! Look here!—piles and piles of parchments! I and Galloway could never get through them, hindered or not hindered. *I* am not going to work over hours! I won't kill myself with labour. There's Port Natal, thank goodness, if the screw does get upon me too much!"

Arthur made no reply. It made little difference to Roland: whether encouraged or not, talk he would.

"I *have* heard of folks being worked beyond their strength;

and that will be my case, if one may judge by present appearances. It's too bad of Jenkins!"

Arthur spoke up: he did not like to hear blame, even from Roland Yorke, cast upon hard-working, patient Jenkins. "You should not say it, Roland. It is not Jenkins's fault"

"It is his fault. What does he have such a wife for? She keeps Jenkins under her thumb, just as Galloway keeps me. She locked up his clothes, and then told him he might come here without them if he liked. My belief is she'll be sending him so some day. Jenkins ought to put her down. He's big enough."

"He would be sure to come here if he were equal to it," said Arthur.

"He! Of course he would!" angrily retorted Roland. "He'd crawl here on all fours, but what he'd come; only she won't let him. She knows it, too. She said this morning that he'd come when he was in his coffin! I should like to see it arrive!"

Arthur had been casting a glance at the papers. They were unusually numerous, and he began to think with Roland that he and Mr. Galloway would not be able to get through them unaided. Most certainly they would not, at Roland's present rate of work. "It is a pity you are not a quick copyist," he said.

"I dare say it is!" sarcastically rejoined Roland, beginning to play at ball with the wafer-box. "I never was made for work; and if——"

"You will have to do it, though, sir," thundered Mr. Galloway, who had come up, and was enjoying a survey of affairs through the open window. Mr. Roland, somewhat taken to, dropped his head and the wafer-box together, and went on with his writing as meekly as poor Jenkins would have done; and Mr. Galloway entered.

"Good-day," said he to Arthur, shortly enough.

"Good-day, sir," was the response.

Mr. Galloway turned to his idle clerk.

"Roland Yorke, you must either work, or say you will not. There is no time for playing and fooling—no time, sir! Do you hear? Who put that window stark staring open?"

"I did, sir," said incorrigible Roland. "I thought the office might be the better for a little air when there was so much to do in it."

Mr. Galloway shut it with a bang. Arthur, who would not leave without some attempt at a passing courtesy, let it be ever so slight, made a remark to Mr. Galloway that he was sorry to hear Jenkins was worse.

"He is so much worse," was the response of Mr. Galloway, spoken sharply for the edification of Roland Yorke, "that I doubt whether he will ever enter this room again.—Yes, sir; you may look, but it is the truth!"

Roland did look—looked with considerable consternation. "How on earth will all the work get done, then?" he muttered. With all his grumbling, he had not contemplated Jenkins being away more than a day or two.

"I do not know how it will get done, considering that the clerk upon whom I have to depend is Roland Yorke," answered Mr. Galloway with severity. "One thing appears pretty evident—that Jenkins will not be able to help to do it."

Mr. Galloway, more perplexed at the news brought by Mrs. Jenkins than he had let appear (for although he chose to make a show of depending upon Roland, he knew how much dependence there was in reality to be placed upon him—none better), had deemed it advisable to see Jenkins personally, and judge for himself of his state of health. Accordingly, he proceeded thither, and arrived at an inopportune moment for his hopes. Jenkins was just recovering from a second fainting fit, and he appeared altogether so ill, so debilitated, that Mr. Galloway was struck with dismay. There would be no more work from Jenkins—as he believed—for him. He mentioned this now in his own office, and Roland received it with blank consternation.

An impulse came to Arthur, and he spoke upon it. "If I can do you any good, sir, in this emergency, you have only to command me."

"What sort of good?" asked Mr. Galloway.

Arthur pointed to the parchments. "I could draw out these deeds, and any others that may follow them. My time is my own, sir, save the two hours devoted to the cathedral, and I am at a loss how to occupy it. I have been idle ever since I left you."

"Why don't you get into an office?" said Mr. Galloway.

Arthur's colour deepened. "Because, sir, nobody will take me."

"Ah!" said Mr. Galloway dryly, "a good name is easier lost than gained."

"Yes, it is," freely replied Arthur. "However, sir, to return to the question. I shall be glad to help you if you have no one better at hand. I could devote several hours a day to it, and you know that I am thoroughly competent to be trusted with the work. I might take some home now."

"Home!" returned Mr. Galloway. "Did you mean that you could do it at home?"

"Certainly, sir; I did not think of doing it here," was the pointed reply of Arthur. "I can do it at home just as well as I could here—perhaps better; for I should shut myself up alone, and there would be nothing to interrupt me or to draw off my attention."

It cannot be denied that this was a most welcome proposition to Mr. Galloway; indeed, his thoughts had turned to Arthur at the first. Arthur would be far preferable to a strange clerk, looked for and brought in on the spur of the moment—one who might answer well or answer ill, according to chance. Yet that such must have been his resource Mr. Galloway knew.

"It will be an accommodation to me, your taking part of the work," he frankly said. "But you had better come to the office and do it."

"No, sir; I would rather——"

"Do, Channing!" cried out Roland Yorke, springing up as if he were electrified. "The office will be bearable if you come back again."

"I would prefer to do it at home, sir," continued Arthur to Mr. Galloway, while that gentleman pointed imperiously to Yorke, as a hint to him to hold his tongue and mind his own business.

"You *may* come back here and do it," said Mr. Galloway.

"Thank you; I cannot come back," was the reply of Arthur.

"Of course you can't!" said angry Roland, who cared less for Mr. Galloway's displeasure than he did for displaying his own feelings when they were aroused. "You won't, you mean! I'd not show myself such a duff as you, Channing, if I were paid in gold to do it!"

"You'll get paid in something presently, Roland Yorke, but it won't be in gold!" reproved Mr. Galloway. "You will do a full day's work to-day, sir, if you stop here till twelve o'clock at night."

"Oh, of course I look out to do that, sir," retorted Roland in a fume. "Considering what's before me, on this desk and on Jenkins's, there's little prospect of my getting home on this side four in the morning. They needn't sit up for me; I can go in with the milk. I wonder who invented writing! I wish I had the fingering of him just now!"

Arthur turned to the parchments. He was nearly as much at home with them as Jenkins. Mr. Galloway selected two that were most pressing, and gave them to him, with the requisite materials for copying. "You will keep them secure, you know," he remarked.

"Perfectly so, sir; I shall sit quite alone."

He carried them off with alacrity. Mr. Galloway's face cleared as he looked after him, and he made a remark aloud, expressive of his satisfaction. "There's some pleasure in giving out work when you know it will be done. No play—no dilatoriness—finished to the minute that it's looked for. You should take a leaf out of his book, Yorke."

"Yes, sir," freely answered Roland. "When you drove Arthur Channing out of this office, you parted with the best clerk you ever had. Jenkins is all very well for work, but he is nothing but a muff in other things. Arthur's a gentleman, and he'd have served you well. Jenkins himself says so. He is honourable, he is honest, he——"

"I know enough of your sentiments with respect to his honesty," interrupted Mr. Galloway. "We need not go over that tale again."

"I hope everybody knows them," rejoined Roland. "I have never concealed my opinion that the accusation was infamous; that of all of us in this office, from its head down to Jenkins, none was less likely to finger the note than Arthur Channing. But, of course, my opinion goes for nothing."

"You are bold, young man."

"I fear it is my nature to be so, sir," cried free Roland. "If it ever should turn up how the note went, you'll be sorry, no doubt, for having visited it upon Arthur. Mr. Channing will be sorry; the precious magistrates will be sorry; that blessed dean, who wanted to turn him from the college, will be sorry. Not a soul of them but believes him guilty; and I hope they'll be brought to repentance for it in sackcloth and ashes."

"Go on with your work," said Mr. Galloway angrily.

Roland made a show of obeying. But his tongue was like a steam engine—once set going, it couldn't readily be stopped; and he presently looked up again.

"I am not uncharitable—at least to individuals. I always said the post-office helped itself to the note, and I'd lay my last half-crown upon it. But there *are* people in the town who think it could only have gone in another way. You'd go into a passion with me, sir, perhaps, if I mentioned it."

Mr. Galloway—it has been before mentioned that he possessed an unbounded amount of curiosity, and also a propensity to gossip—so far forgot the force of good example as to ask Roland what he meant. Roland wanted no better encouragement.

"Well, sir, there are people who, weighing well all the probabilities of the case, have come to the conclusion that the note could only have been abstracted from the letter by the person to whom it was addressed. None but he broke the seal of it."

"Do you allude to my cousin, Mr. Robert Galloway?" ejaculated Mr. Galloway as soon as indignation and breath allowed him to speak.

"Others do," said Roland. "I say it was the post-office."

"How dare you repeat so insolent a suspicion to my face, Roland Yorke?"

"I said I should catch it!" cried Roland, speaking partly to himself. "I am sure to get in for it, one way or another, do what I will. It's not my fault, sir, if I have heard it spoken in the town."

"Apply yourself to your work, sir, and hold your tongue. If you say another word, Roland Yorke, I shall feel inclined also to turn you away as one idle and incorrigible, of whom nothing can be made."

"Wouldn't it be a jovial excuse for Port Natal!" exclaimed Roland, but not in the hearing of his master, who had gone into his own room in much wrath. Roland laughed aloud; there was nothing he enjoyed so much as to be in opposition to Mr. Galloway. It had been better for the advancement of that gentleman's work had he habitually kept a tighter rein over his pupil. It was perfectly true, however, that the new phase of suspicion regarding the loss of the note had been spoken of in the town, and Roland only repeated what he had heard.

Apparently Mr. Galloway did not like this gratuitous suggestion. He presently came back again. A paper was in his hand, and he began comparing it with one on Roland's desk. "Where did you hear that unjustifiable piece of scandal?" he inquired as he was doing it.

"The first person I heard speak of it was my mother, sir. She came home one day from calling upon people, and said she had heard it somewhere. And it was talked of at Knivett's last night. He had a bachelors' party, and the subject was brought up. Some of us ridiculed the notion; others thought it might have grounds."

"And, pray, which did you favour?" sarcastically asked Mr. Galloway.

"I? I said then, as I have said all along, that there was nobody to thank for it but the post-office. If you ask me, sir, who first set the notion afloat in the town, I cannot satisfy you. All I know is, the rumour is circulating."

"If I could discover the primary author of it, I would take legal steps to punish him," warmly concluded Mr. Galloway.

"I'd help," said undaunted Roland. "Some fun might arise out of that."

Mr. Galloway carried the probate of a will to his room, and sat down to examine it. But his thoughts were elsewhere. This suspicion mentioned by Roland Yorke had laid hold of his mind most unpleasantly, in spite of his show of indignation before Roland. He had no cause to deem his cousin otherwise than honest—it was next to impossible to suppose he could be guilty of playing him such a trick; but somehow Mr. Galloway could not feel so sure upon the point as he would have wished. His cousin was a needy man—one who had made ducks and drakes of his own property, and was for ever appealing to Mr. Galloway for assistance. Mr. Galloway did not shut his eyes to the fact that if this *should* have been the case, Robert Galloway had had forty pounds from him instead of twenty—a great help to a man at his wits' end for money. He had forwarded a second twenty-pound note upon receiving information of the loss of the first.

What he most disliked, looking at it from this point of view, was not the feeling that he had been cleverly deceived and laughed at, but that Arthur Channing should have suffered unjustly. If the lad *was* innocent, why, how cruel had been his own conduct towards him! But with these doubts came back the remembrance of Arthur's unsatisfactory behaviour with respect to the loss—his non-denial, his apparent guilt, his strange shrinking from investigation. Busy as Mr. Galloway was that day, he could not confine his thoughts to his business; he would willingly have given another twenty-pound note out of his pocket to know, beyond doubt, whether or not Arthur was guilty.

Arthur, meanwhile, had commenced his task. He took possession of the study, where he was secure from interruption, and applied himself diligently to it. How still the house seemed! How still it had seemed since the loss of Charles! Even Annabel and Tom were wont to hush their voices—ever listening, as it were, for tidings to be brought of him. Save the two servants, Arthur was alone in it. Hamish was abroad at his office; Constance and Annabel were at Lady Augusta's; Tom was in school; and Charles was not. Judith's voice would be heard now and then, wafted from the kitchen regions, in direction or reproof to Sarah; but there was no other sound. Arthur thought of the old days when the sun had shone; when he was free and upright in the sight of men; when Constance was happy in her future prospects of wedded life; when Tom looked forth certainly to the seniorship; when Charley's sweet voice and sweeter face might be seen and heard; when Hamish—oh, bitter thought of all!—when Hamish had not fallen from his pedestal. It had all changed—changed to darkness and to gloom; and Arthur may be pardoned for feeling gloomy with it. But in the very midst of this gloom there arose suddenly, without effort of his, certain words spoken by the consoling singer of Israel; and Arthur *knew* that he had but to trust to them,—

"For His wrath endureth but the twinkling of an eye, and in His pleasure is life; heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A LETTER FOR MR. GALLOWAY.

MORNING passed into afternoon, and afternoon was drawing towards its close. Roland Yorke had contrived to struggle through it, and be alive still, in spite of the amount of work which was pressed upon him. Mr. Galloway had put on his spectacles and copied out several pages himself—a thing he rarely attempted. But he had gone out now, and had carried with him some letters to post.

"Yes!" grumbled Roland. "He can stretch *his* legs, but he takes good care I shall not stretch mine! Why couldn't he send me with those letters? It's my place to post them; it's not his. Write, write, write! till my fingers have got the cramp, and my feet have no more feeling in them than the stool has! Why, I wouldn't stop by myself in this horrid, musty, parchmented old place.—Oh, it's you, is it?"

This was addressed to the postman, who came in with the afternoon delivery of letters—two—which he handed to Roland, and departed.

Of course Roland immediately began to scrutinize them, turning them over, critically guessing at the senders, playing with them at pitch and toss—anything to while away the time, and afford him some cessation from his own work. By these means he contrived to pass five minutes rather agreeably (estimating things by comparison), when Mr. Galloway's servant entered.

"Is my master in, Mr. Roland?"

"Of course he's not," said Roland. "He's gone gallivanting somewhere. He has all the pleasure of it, and I have all the work."

"Will you please to give him this letter then?" said the man. "The post has just left it at our house, so I brought it round."

"What's it brought round here for?" asked Roland.

"Because he ordered it done. He said he expected a letter would be delivered at the house by the afternoon post, and if it came I was to bring it to him at once. Good-afternoon, sir."

This little bit of information was quite enough for Roland. He seized the letter, as he had done the others, and subjected it to the like scrutiny. The address was written in a singular hand—in large, print-looking letters. Roland satisfied his curiosity, so far as the outside of the letter could do it, and then rose from his stool and laid the three letters upon Mr. Galloway's desk in his private room.

A short while and that gentleman entered. "Anything by the post?" was his first question.

"Two letters, sir," replied Roland. "And John brought round one which was addressed to the house. He said you expected it."

Mr. Galloway went into his private room. He glanced casually at the addresses on the letters, and then called Roland Yorke. "Where is the letter John brought round?" he inquired somewhat testily.

Roland pointed it out. "That was it, sir."

"That!" Mr. Galloway bent on it a keener glance, which probably satisfied him that it bore his private address. "Was this the only one he brought?" added he; and from his manner and words Roland inferred that it was not the letter he had expected.

"That was all, sir."

Roland returned to his own room, and Mr. Galloway sat down and opened his letters. The first two were short communications relative to business; the last was the one brought by John.

What did it contain? For one thing it contained a bank-note for twenty pounds. But the contents? Mr. Galloway gazed at it, and rubbed his brow and gazed again. He took off his spectacles and put them on; he looked at the bank-note, and he read and re-read the letter, for it completely upset the theory and set at nought the data he had been going upon—especially the data of the last few hours.

"The finder of that lost twenty-pound note sends it back to Mr. Galloway. His motive in doing so is that the wrongly suspected may be cleared. He who was publicly accused of the offence was innocent, as were all others upon whom suspicion (though not acted upon) may have fallen. The writer of this alone took the note, and now he restores it."

Abrupt and signatureless, such was the letter. When Mr. Galloway had sufficiently overcome his surprise to reason rationally, it struck him as being a singular coincidence that this should come to him on the day when the old affair had been renewed again. Since its bustle had died out at the time of the occurrence, Mr. Galloway did not remember to have voluntarily spoken of it until that morning with Roland Yorke.

He took up the bank-note. Was it the one actually taken—the same note, kept possibly in fear, and now returned? He had no means of knowing. He thought it was not the same. His recollection of the lost note had seemed to be that it was a dirty one, which must have passed through many hands; but he had never been quite clear upon that point. This note was clean and crisp

Who *had* taken it? Who had sent it back? It entirely disposed of that disagreeable suspicion touching his cousin. Had his cousin so far forgotten himself as to take the note, he would not have been likely to return it; *he* knew nothing of the proceedings which had taken place in Helstonleigh, for Mr. Galloway had never mentioned them to him. The writer of this letter was cognizant of them, and had sent it, that they might be removed.

At the first glance it of course appeared to be a proof positive that Arthur Channing was not guilty. But Mr. Galloway was not accustomed to take only the superficial view of things; and it struck him, as it would strike others, that this might be, after all, a refined bit of finesse on Arthur's own part to remove the suspicion off himself. True, the cost of essaying it was twenty pounds; but what was that compared in value to the restoration of his good name?

The letter bore the London post-mark. There was not a doubt that it had been there posted. That told nothing. Arthur, or anybody else, could get a letter posted there if wishing to do it. "Where there's a will there's a way," thought Mr. Galloway. But again, where was Arthur Channing to get twenty pounds from? Mr. Galloway did not think that he could get this sum from anywhere, or that he possessed himself a twentieth part of it. So far, the probability was against Arthur's being the author. Mr. Galloway quite lost himself in conjectures. Why should it have been addressed to his residence and not to the office? He had been expecting a letter from one that afternoon who always did address to his residence; and that letter, it appeared, had not come. However, that had nothing to do with this. Neither paper nor writing afforded any clue, and the latter was palpably disguised.

He called in Roland Yorke for the purpose of putting to him a few useless questions—like a great many of us do when we are puzzled—questions, at any rate, that could throw no light upon the main subject.

"What did John say when he brought this letter?"

"Only what I told you, sir. That you expected a letter addressed to the house, and ordered him to bring it round."

"But *this* is not the letter I expected," tapping it with his finger, and looking altogether so puzzled and astonished that Roland stared in his turn.

"It's not my fault," returned he. "Shall I run round, sir, and ask John about it?"

"No," testily answered Mr Galloway. "Don't be so fond of running round. This letter—— There's somebody come into the office," he broke off.

Roland turned with alacrity, but very speedily appeared again, on his best behaviour, bowing as he showed in the Dean of Helstonleigh.

Mr. Galloway rose, and remained standing. The dean entered upon the business which had brought him there, a trifling matter connected with the affairs of the chapter. This over, Mr. Galloway took up the letter and showed it to him. The dean read it, and looked at the banknote.

"I cannot quite decide in what light I ought to take it, sir," remarked Mr. Galloway. "It either refutes the suspicion of Arthur Channing's guilt, or else it confirms it."

"In what way confirms it? I do not understand you," said the dean.

"It may have come from himself, Mr. Dean—a wheel within a wheel."

The dean paused to revolve the proposition, and then shook his head negatively. "It appears to me to go a very great way towards proving his innocence," he observed. "The impression upon my own mind has been that it was not he who took it—as you may have inferred, Mr. Galloway, by my allowing him to retain his post in the cathedral."

"But, sir, if he is innocent, who is guilty?" continued Mr. Galloway in a tone of remonstrance.

"That is more than I can say," replied the dean. "But for the circumstances appearing to point so strongly to Arthur Channing, I never could have suspected him at all. A son of Mr. Channing's would have been altogether above suspicion in my mind; and, as I tell you, for some time I have not believed him to be guilty."

"If he is not guilty"—Mr. Galloway paused, the full force of what he was about to say pressing strongly upon his mind—"if he is not guilty, Mr. Dean, there has been a great deal of injustice done, not only to himself——"

"A great deal of injustice is committed every day, I fear," quietly remarked the dean.

"Tom Channing will have lost the seniorship for nothing," went on Mr. Galloway in a perturbed voice, not so much addressing the dean as giving vent to his thoughts aloud.

"Yes," was the answer, spoken calmly, and imparting no token of what might be the dean's private sentiments upon the point. "You will see to that matter," the dean continued, referring to his own business there, as he rose from his chair.

"I will not forget it, Mr. Dean," said Mr. Galloway. And he escorted the dean to the outer door, as was his custom when honoured by him with a visit, and bowed him out.

Roland just then looked a pattern of industry. He had resumed his seat, after rising in salutation as the dean passed through the office, and was writing away like a steam-engine. Mr. Galloway returned to his own room, and set himself calmly to consider all the bearings of this curious business. The great bar to his being able fully to regard Arthur as innocent was the difficulty there existed of fixing upon anybody else as likely to have been guilty. Likely !—he might almost have said as *possible* to have been guilty. "I have a very great mind," he growled to himself, "to send for Butterby and let him rake it all up again!" The uncertainty vexed him, and it seemed as if the affair was never to have an end. "What if I show Arthur Channing the letter first, and study his countenance as he looks at it? I may gather something from that. I don't fancy he'd be an over good actor as some might be. If he has sent this money, I shall see it in his face."

Acting upon the moment's impulse, he suddenly opened the door of the outer office, and there found that Mr. Roland's industry had for the present come to an end. He was standing before the window, making pantomimic signs through the glass to a friend of his, Knivett. His right thumb was pointed over his shoulder towards the door of Mr. Galloway's private room—no doubt, to indicate a warning that that gentleman was inside it, and that the office, consequently, was not free for promiscuous intruders. A few sharp words of reprimand to Mr. Roland ensued, and then he was sent off with a message to Arthur Channing.

It brought Arthur back with Roland. Mr. Galloway called Arthur into his own room, closed the door, and put the letter into his hand in silence.

He read it over twice before he could comprehend it: indeed, he did not do so fully then. His surprise appeared to be perfectly genuine, and so Mr. Galloway deemed it. "Has this letter been sent to you, sir? Has any money been sent to you?"

"This has been sent to me," replied Mr. Galloway, tossing to him the twenty-pound note. "Is it the one that was taken, Channing ?"

"How can I tell, sir ?" said Arthur in much simplicity. And Mr. Galloway's long doubts of him began to melt away.

"*You* did not send the money—to clear yourself ?"

Arthur looked up in surprise. "Where should I get twenty pounds from ?" he asked. "I shall have a quarter's salary from Mr. Williams shortly ; but it is not quite due yet. And it will not be twenty pounds, or anything like that amount."

Mr. Galloway nodded. It was the thought which had struck himself. Another thought, however, was now striking Arthur—a thought which caused his cheek to flush and his brow to lower. With the word "salary" had arisen the remembrance of another's salary, due about this time—that of his brother Hamish. Had Hamish been making this use of it—to take the stigma from him ? The idea received additional force from Mr. Galloway's next words, for they bore upon the point.

"This letter is what it purports to be—a missive from the actual thief ; or else it comes from some well-wisher of yours, who sacrifices twenty pounds to do you a service. Which is it ?"

Mr. Galloway fixed his eyes on Arthur's face, and could not help noting the change which had come over it, over his bearing altogether. The open candour was gone ; and in its place reigned the covert look, the hesitating manner, the confusion which had characterized him at the period of the loss. "All I can say, sir, is that I know nothing of this," he presently said. "It has surprised me as much as it can surprise any one."

"Channing !" impulsively exclaimed Mr. Galloway, "your manner and your words are in opposition, as they were at the time. The one gives the lie to the other. But I begin to believe you did not take it."

"I did not," returned Arthur.

"And therefore—as I don't like to be played with and made sport of, like a cat tormenting a mouse—I think I shall give orders to Butterby for a fresh investigation."

It startled Arthur. The curiously significant tone of Mr. Galloway, his piercing gaze upon his face, also startled him. "It would bring no satisfaction, sir," he said. "Pray do not. I would far rather continue to bear the blame."

A pause. A new idea came glimmering into the mind of Mr. Galloway. "Whom are you screening?" he asked. But he received no answer. "Is it Roland Yorke?"

"Roland Yorke!" repeated Arthur, half reproachfully. "No, indeed. I wish everybody had been as innocent of it as was Roland Yorke."

In good truth, Mr Galloway had only mentioned Roland's name as coming uppermost in his mind. He knew that there was no suspicion attaching to Roland. Arthur resumed in agitation,—

"Let the matter drop, sir. Indeed, it will be better. It appears now that you have the money back again; and for the rest, I am willing to take the blame, as I have done."

"If I have the money back again, I have not other things back again," crossly repeated Mr. Galloway. "There's the loss of time it has occasioned, the worry, the uncertainty; who is to repay me all that?"

"My portion in it has been worse than yours, sir," said Arthur in a low, deep tone. "Think of my loss of time, my worry and uncertainty, my loss of character, my anxiety of mind; they can never be repaid to me."

"And whose the fault? If you were truly innocent, you might have cleared yourself with a word."

Arthur knew he might. But that word he had not dared to speak. At this juncture Roland Yorke appeared. "Here's Jenner's old clerk come in, sir," said he to his master. "He wants to see yourself, he says."

"He can come in," replied Mr. Galloway. "Are you getting on with that copying?" he added to Arthur, as the latter was going out.

"Yes, sir."

The gentleman whom Roland Yorke designated as "Jenner's old clerk" was shut in with Mr. Galloway, and Roland, who appeared to be on the thorns of curiosity, arrested Arthur.

"I say, what is it that's agate? He has been going into fits pretty near over some letter that came, asking me five hundred questions about it. What have you got to do with it? What does he want with you?"

"Somebody has been sending him the money back, Roland. It came in a letter."

Roland opened his eyes. "What money?"

"The money that was lost. A twenty-pound note has come. He asked me whether it was the veritable note that was taken."

"A twenty-pound note come!" repeated puzzled Roland.

"It's true, Roland. It purports to be sent by the taker of the money for the purpose of clearing me."

Roland stood for a few moments, profound surprise on his face, and then began to execute a hornpipe of triumph amid the desks and stools of the office. "I said it would come right sometime; over and over again I did! Give us your hand, old fellow! He's not such a bad trump after all, that thief!"

"Hush, Roland! you'll be heard. It may not do me much good. Galloway seems to doubt me still."

"Doubt you still!" cried Roland, stopping short in his dance and speaking in a very explosive tone. "Doubt you *still!* Why, what would he have?"

"I don't know," sighed Arthur. "I have assured him I did not send it, but he fancies I may have done it to whiten myself. He talks of calling in Butterby again."

"My opinion, then, is that he wants to be transported, if he is to turn up such a heathen as that!" stamped Roland. "What would he have, I ask? Another twenty, given him for interest? Arthur, dear old fellow, let's go off together to Port Natal, and leave him and his office to it! I'll find the means, if I rob his cash-box to get them!"

But Arthur was already beyond hearing, having waved his adieu to Roland Yorke and his impetuous but warm-hearted championship. Anxious to get on with the task he had undertaken, he hastened home. Constance was in the hall when he entered, having just returned from Lady Augusta Yorke's.

His confidante throughout, his gentle soother and supporter, his ever-ready adviser, Arthur drew her into one of the rooms and acquainted her with what had occurred. A look of terror rose to her face as she listened.

"Hamish has done it!" she uttered in a whisper. "This puts all doubt at an end. There are times—there have been times"—she burst into tears as she spoke—"when I have fondly tried to cheat myself that we were suspecting him wrongfully. Arthur, others suspect him."

Arthur's face caught the same look that was upon hers. "I trust not!"

"But they do. Ellen Huntley has dropped an inadvertent word, which convinces me he is in some way doubted there. She caught it up again in evident alarm ere it was well spoken, and I dared not pursue the subject. It is Hamish who has sent this money."

"You speak confidently, Constance."

"Listen. I know that he has drawn money—papa's salary and his own; he mentioned it incidentally. A few days ago I asked him for money for housekeeping purposes, and he handed me a twenty-pound note in mistake for a five-pound. He discovered the mistake before I did, and snatched it back again in some confusion. 'I can't give you that,' he said in a laughing manner, when he recovered himself. 'That has a different destination.' Arthur, that note, rely upon it, was going to Mr. Galloway."

"When was this?" asked Arthur.

"Last week. Three or four days ago."

Trifling as the incident was, it seemed to bear out their suspicions, and Arthur could only come to the same conclusion that his sister did; the thought had already crossed him, you remember. "Do not let it pain you thus, Constance," he said, for her tears were falling fast. "He may not call in Butterby. Your grieving will do no good."

"I cannot help it," she exclaimed, with a burst of anguish. "How God is trying us!"

Ay, like as the silver, which must be seven times purified ere it be sufficiently refined.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DARK CLOUDS.

Constance Channing sat, her forehead buried in her hands. *How God was trying them!* The sentence, wrung from her in the bitterness of her heart, but expressed the echo of surrounding things. Her own future blighted; Arthur's character gone; Tom lost the seniorship; Charley not heard of, dead or alive! There were moments, and this was one, when Constance felt almost beyond the pale of hope. The college school, meanwhile, existed in a state of constant suspense, the sword of terror ever hanging over its head. Punishment for the present was reserved; and what the precise punishment would be when it came none could tell. Talkative Bywater was fond of saying that it did not matter whether Miss Charley turned up or not, so far as their backs were concerned; *they* would be made to tingle either way.

Arthur, after communicating to Constance the strange fact of the return of the money to Mr. Galloway, shut himself up in the study to pursue his copying. It was the tea-hour, and Sarah brought in the things. But neither Hamish nor Tom had come in; and Constance sat alone, deep in her unpleasant thoughts.

That it was Hamish who had now returned the money to Mr. Galloway, Constance could not entertain the slightest doubt. It had a very depressing effect upon her. It could not render worse what had previously happened—indeed, it rather mended it, insomuch as that it served to evince some repentance, some good feeling; but it made the suspicion against Hamish a certainty, and there had been times when Constance had been beguiled into thinking it only a suspicion. And now came this new fear of Mr. Butterby again.

Hamish's own footstep in the hall! Constance roused herself. He came in, books under his arm as usual, and his ever-gay face smiling. There were times when Constance nearly despised him for his perpetual sunshine. The seriousness which had overspread Hamish at the time of Charley's disappearance had nearly worn away. In his sanguine temperament, he argued that the not finding the corpse was a proof that Charley was alive yet, and would come forth in a mysterious manner one of these days.

"Have I kept you waiting tea, Constance?" began he. "I came home by way of Close Street, and was called into Galloway's by Roland Yorke, and then got detained further by Mr. Galloway. Where's Arthur?"

"He has undertaken some copying for Mr. Galloway, and is busy with it," replied Constance in a low tone. "Hamish," raising her eyes to his face as she took resolution to speak of the affair, "have you heard what has happened?"

"That some benignant fairy has forwarded a bank-note to Galloway on the wings of the telegraph? Roland Yorke would not allow me to remain in ignorance of that. Mr. Galloway did me the honour to ask whether I had sent it."

"You!" uttered Constance, regarding the avowal only from her own point of view. "He asked whether *you* had sent it?"

"He did."

She gazed at Hamish as if she would read his very soul. "And what did—what did you answer?"

"Told him I wished a few others would suspect me of the same, and count imaginary payments for real ones."

"Hamish!" she exclaimed, the complaint wrung from her, "how can you be so light, so cruel, when our hearts are breaking?"

Hamish, in turn, was surprised at this. "I cruel! In what manner, Constance? My dear, I repeat to you that we shall have Charley back. I feel sure of it; and it has done away with my fear. Some inward conviction, or instinct—you may call it which you like—tells me that we shall; and I implicitly trust to it. We need not mourn for him."

"It is not for Charley; I do not speak of Charley now," she sadly reiterated. "You are straying from the point. Hamish, have you *no* love left for Arthur?"

"I have plenty of love for everybody," said Mr. Hamish.

"Then *how* can you behave like this? Arthur is not guilty; you know he is not. And look what he has to bear! I believe you would laugh at the greatest calamity! The sending back this money to Mr. Galloway has—has—sadly distressed me."

Hamish turned his smiling eyes upon her, but his tone was grave. "Wait until some great calamity occurs, Constance, and then see whether I laugh. Did I laugh that dreadful night and day that succeeded to the loss of Charley? The sending back the money to Mr. Galloway is not a cause for sadness. It most certainly exonerates Arthur."

"And you are gay over it!" She would have given anything to speak more plainly.

"I am particularly gay this afternoon," acknowledged Hamish, who could not be put out of temper by any amount of reproach whatever. "I have had great news by the post, Constance."

"From Germany?" she quickly cried.

"Yes, from Germany," he answered, taking a letter from his pocket and spreading it open before Constance.

It contained the bravest news—great news, as Hamish expressed it. It was from Mr. Channing himself, and it told them that he was so far restored that there was no doubt now of his being able to resume his own place at his office. They intended to be home the first week in November. The weather at Borcette continued warm and charming, and they would prolong their stay there to the full time contemplated, and enjoy the benefit of it. It had been a fine autumn everywhere. There was a postscript added to the letter, as if an afterthought had occurred to Mr. Channing. "When you see Mr. Huntley, tell him how well I am progressing. I remember, by the way, that he hinted at being able to introduce you to something, should I no longer require you in Guild Street."

In the glad delight that the news brought, Constance lost sight partially of her sadness. "It is not all gloom," she whispered to herself. "If we could but dwell on God's mercies as we do on this chastisement; if we could but feel more trust, we should see the bright side of the cloud oftener than we do."

But it *was* dark—dark in many ways—and Constance was soon to be reminded again of it forcibly. She had taken her seat at the tea-table when Tom came in. He looked flushed—stern; and he flung his Gradus and one or two other books in a lump on the side-table with more force than was necessary, and himself into a chair ditto.

"Constance, I shall leave the school!"

Constance in her dismay dropped the sugar-tongs amidst the sugar. "What, Tom?"

"I shall leave the school!" he repeated, his tone as fiery as his face. "I'd not stop in it another month if I were bribed with gold. Things are getting too bad there."

"O Tom, Tom! Is this your endurance?"

"Endurance!" he exclaimed. "That's a nice word in theory, Constance; but just you try it in practice! Who has endured if I have not? I thought I'd go on and endure it, as you say—at any rate, until papa came home. But I can't—I can't!"

"What has happened more than usual?" inquired Hamish.

"It gets worse and worse," said Tom, turning his blazing face upon his brother. "I'd not wish a dog to live the life that I live in the college school. They call me a felon, and treat me as one; they send me to Coventry; they won't acknowledge me as one of their seniors. My position is unbearable."

"Live it down, Tom," said Hamish quietly.

"Haven't I been trying to live it down?" returned the boy, suppressing his emotion. "It has lasted now these two months, and I have borne it daily. At the time of Charley's loss I was treated better for a day or two, but that has worn away. It is of no use your looking at me reproachfully, Constance; I *must* complain. What other boy in the world has ever been put down as I? I was the head of the school, next to Gaunt—looking forward to be the head; and what am I now? The seniorship taken from me in shame; Huntley exalted to my place; my chance of the exhibition gone——"

"Huntley does not take the exhibition," interrupted Constance.

"But Yorke will. *I* shan't be allowed to get it. Now I know it, Constance, and the school knows it. Let a fellow once go down, and he's kept down; every dog has a fling at him. The seniorship's gone, the exhibition is going. I might bear that tamely, you might say—and of course I might, for they are negative evils; but what I can't and won't bear are the insults of everyday life. Only this afternoon they——"

Tom stopped, for his feelings were choking him; and the complaint he was about to relate was never spoken. Before he had gathered breath and calmness, Arthur entered and took his seat at the tea-table. Poor Tom, allowing one of his unfortunate explosions of temper to get the better of him, sprang from his chair and burst forth with a passionate reproach to Arthur, whom he regarded as the author of all the ill.

"Why did you do it? Why did you bring this disgrace upon us? But for you I should not have lost caste in the school."

"Tom!" interposed Hamish in a severe tone.

Master Tom, brave college boy that he was, manly as he coveted to be deemed, actually burst into tears—tears called forth, not by contrition, I fear, but by remembered humiliation, by vexation, by the moment's passion. Never had Tom cast a reproach openly to Arthur—whatever he may have felt, he buried it within himself—but that his opinion vacillated upon the point of Arthur's guilt was certain. Constance went up to him and laid her hand gently and soothingly upon his shoulder.

"Tom, dear boy, your troubles are making you forget yourself. Do not be unjust to Arthur. He is innocent as you."

"Then, if he is innocent, why does he not speak out like a man, and proclaim his innocence?" retorted Tom, sensibly enough, but with rather too much heat. "That's what the school cast in my teeth more than anything again. 'Don't preach up your brother's innocence to us!' they cry; 'if he did not take it, wouldn't he say so?' Look at Arthur now"—and Tom pointed his finger at him—"he does not, even here, to me, assert that he is innocent!"

Arthur's face burnt under the reproach. He turned it upon Hamish with a gesture almost as fiery, quite as hasty, as any that had been vouchsafed them by Tom. Plainly as look could speak, it said, "Will *you* suffer this injustice to be heaped upon me?" Constance saw the look, and she quitted Tom with a faint cry, and bent over Arthur, afraid of what truth he might give utterance to.

"Patience yet, Arthur!" she whispered. "Do not let a moment's anger undo the work of weeks. Remember how bravely you have borne."

"Ay, Heaven forgive my pride!—Tom," Arthur added, turning to him calmly, "I would clear you, or rather clear myself, in the eyes of the school if I could, but it is impossible. However, you have less to blame me for than you may deem."

Hamish advanced. He caught the arm of Tom and drew him to a distant window. "Now, lad," he said, "let me hear all about this bugbear. I'll see if it can be in any way lightened for you."

Hamish's tone was kindly, his manner frank and persuasive, and Tom was won over to speak of his troubles. Hamish listened with an attentive ear. "Will you abide by my advice?" he asked him, when the catalogue of grievances had come to an end.

"Perhaps I will," replied Tom, who was growing cool after his heat.

"Then, as I said to you before, so I say now—*Live it down*. It is the best advice I can give you."

"Hamish, you don't know what it is!"

"Yes, I do. I can enter into your trials and annoyances as keenly as if I had to encounter them. I do not affect to disparage them to you; I know that they are real trials, real insults; but if you will only make up your mind to bear them, they will lose half their sharpness. Your interest lies in remaining in the college school; more than that, your duty lies in it. Tom, don't let it be said that a Channing shrank from his duty because it brought him difficulties."

"I don't think I *can* stop in it, Hamish. I'd rather stand in a pillory and have rotten eggs splashed at me."

"Yes, you can. In fact, my boy, for the present you *must*. Disobedience has never been a fault among us, and I am sure you will not be the one to inaugurate it. Your father left me in charge, in his place, with full control; and I cannot sanction any such measure as that of your quitting the school. In less than a month's time he will be home, and you can then submit the case to him, and abide by his advice."

With all Tom's faults, he was not rebellious, neither was he unreasonable; and he made up his mind, not without some grumbling, to do as Hamish desired him. He drew his chair with a jerk to the tea-table, which of course there was no necessity for. I told you that the young Channings, admirably as they had been brought up, had their faults—like you have yours and I have mine

It was a silent meal. Annabel, who was wont to keep them alive, whatever might be their troubles, had remained to take tea at Lady Augusta Yorke's with Caroline and Fanny. Had Constance known that she was in the habit of thoughtlessly chattering upon any subject that came uppermost, including poor Charles's propensity to be afraid of ghosts, she had allowed her to remain with them more charily. Hamish took a book and read, eating his bread and butter absently. Arthur only made a show of taking anything, and soon left them to resume his employment; Tom did not even make a show of it, but unequivocally rejected all good things. "How could he be hungry?" he asked, when Constance pressed him. An unsocial meal it was—as unpleasant nearly as were their inward thoughts. They felt for Tom in the midst of their graver griefs; but they were all at cross-purposes together, and they knew it; therefore they could only retain an uncomfortable reticence one with another. Tom laid the blame to the share of Arthur; Arthur and Constance to the share of Hamish. To whom Hamish laid it was only known to himself.

He (Hamish) rose as the tea-things were carried away. He was preparing for a visit to Mr. Huntley's. His visits there, as already remarked, had not been frequent of late. He had discovered that he was not welcome to Mr. Huntley. And Hamish Channing was not one to thrust his company upon any one; even the attraction of Ellen could not induce that. But it is very probable that he was glad of the excuse Mr. Channing's letter afforded him to go thither now.

He found Miss Huntley alone—a tall, stiff lady, who always looked as if she were cased in whalebone. She generally regarded Hamish with some favour, which was saying a great deal for Miss Huntley.

"You are quite a stranger here," she remarked to him as he entered.

"I think I am," replied Hamish. "Mr. Huntley is still in the dining-room, I hear?"

"Mr. Huntley is," said the lady, speaking as if the fact did not give her pleasure, though Hamish could not conceive for why. "My niece has chosen to remain with him," she added in a tone which denoted dissatisfaction. "I am quite *tired* of talking to her! I tell her this is proper, and the other is improper, and she goes and mixes up my advice together in the most extraordinary way, leaving alone what she ought to do, and doing what I tell her she ought not! Only this very morning I read her a sermon upon 'Propriety, and the fitness of things.' It took me just an hour—an hour by my watch, I assure you, Mr. Hamish Channing!—and what is the result? I retired from the dinner-table precisely ten minutes after the removal of the cloth, according to my invariable custom; and Ellen, in defiance of my warning her that it is not lady-like, stays there behind me! 'I have not eaten my grapes yet, aunt,' she says to me. And there she stays, just to talk with her father. And he encourages her! What will become of Ellen I cannot imagine; she will never be a lady!"

"It's very sad!" replied Hamish, coughing down a laugh, and putting on the gravest face he could call up.

"Sad!" repeated Miss Huntley, who sat perfectly upright, her hands, cased in mittens, crossed upon her lap. "It is *grievous*, Mr. Hamish Channing! She—what do you think she did only yesterday? One of our maids was going to be married, and a dispute, or some unpleasantness occurred between her and the intended husband. Would you believe that Ellen actually wrote a letter for the girl (a poor, ignorant thing, who never learnt to read, let alone to write, but an excellent servant) to this man, that things might be smoothed between them? My niece, Miss Ellen Huntley, lowering herself to write a—a—I can scarcely allow my tongue to utter the word, Mr. Hamish—a love-letter!"

Miss Huntley lifted her eyes and her mittens. Hamish expressed himself inexpressibly shocked, inwardly wishing he could get Miss Ellen Huntley to write a few to him.

"And I get no sympathy from any one!" pursued Miss Huntley. "None! I spoke to my brother, and he could not see that she had done anything wrong in writing, or pretended that he could not. Oh, dear! how things are altered from what they were when I was a young girl! Then——"

"My master says, will you please to walk into the dining-room, sir?" interrupted a servant at this juncture. And Hamish rose and followed him.

Mr. Huntley was alone. Hamish threw his glance to the various parts of the room, but Ellen was not in it. The meeting was not very cordial on Mr. Huntley's side. "What can I do for you?" he inquired as he shook hands, which was sufficient to imply coldly, "You must have come to my house for some particular purpose. What is it?"

But Hamish could not lose his sunny temperament, his winning manner. "I bring you great news, Mr. Huntley. We have heard from Borcette; and the improvement in my father's health is so great that all doubts as to the result are over."

"I said it would be so," replied Mr. Huntley.

Some little time they continued talking, and then Hamish mentioned the matter alluded to in the postscript of the letter. "Is it correct that you will be able to help me to something," he inquired, "when my father shall resume his own place in Guild Street?"

"It is correct that I told your father so," answered Mr. Huntley. "I thought then that I could."

"And is the situation gone? I assume that it was a situation."

"It is not gone. The post will not be vacant until the beginning of the year. Have you heard that there is to be a change in the joint-stock bank?"

"No," replied Hamish, looking up with much interest.

"Mr. Bartlett leaves. He is getting in years, his health is failing him, and he wishes to retire. As one of the largest shareholders in the bank, I shall possess the largest voice in the appointment of a successor, and I had thought of you. Indeed, I have no objection to say that there is not the slightest doubt you would have been appointed · otherwise, I should not have spoken confidently to Mr. Channing."

It was an excellent post; there was no doubt of that. The bank was not an extensive one—it was not the principal bank of Helstonleigh—but it was a firmly-established, thoroughly-respectable concern; and Mr. Bartlett, who had been its manager for many years, enjoyed desirable privileges and a handsome salary—a far larger salary than was Mr. Channing's. The dwelling-house, a good one, attached to the bank, was used as his residence, and would be, when he left, the residence of his successor.

"I should like it of all things!" cried Hamish.

"So would many a one, young sir, who is in a better position than you," dryly answered Mr. Huntley. "I thought you might have filled it."

"Can I not, sir?"

"No."

Hamish did not expect the answer. He looked inquiringly at Mr. Huntley. "Why can I not?"

"Because I cannot now recommend you to it," was the reply.

"But why not?" exclaimed Hamish.

"When I spoke of you as becoming Mr. Bartlett's successor, I believed you would be found worthy to fulfil his duties."

"I can fulfil them," said Hamish.

"Possibly. But so much doubt has arisen upon that point in my own mind that I can no longer recommend you for it. In fact, I could not sanction your appointment."

"What have I done?" inquired Hamish.

"Ask your conscience. If that does not tell you plainly enough, I shall not."

"My conscience accuses me of nothing that need render me unfit to fill the post and to perform my duties in it, Mr. Huntley."

"I think otherwise. But to pursue the subject will be productive of no benefit, so we will let it drop. I would have secured you the appointment, could I have done so conscientiously, but I cannot; and the matter is at an end."

"At least you can tell me why you will not?" said Hamish, speaking with some sarcasm in the midst of his respect.

"I have already declined. Ask your own conscience, Hamish."

"The worst criminal has a right to know his accusation, Mr. Huntley. Otherwise he cannot defend himself."

"It will be time enough for you to defend yourself when you are publicly accused. I shall say no more upon the point. I am sorry your father mentioned the thing to you, necessitating this explanation so far; I have also been sorry for having ever mentioned it to him. My worse explanation will be with your father, for I cannot enter into cause and effect any more than I can to you."

"I have for some little time been conscious of a change in your mind towards me, Mr. Huntley."

"Ay—no doubt."

"Sir, you *ought* to tell me what has caused it. I might explain away any prejudice or wrong impression——"

"There, that will do," interrupted Mr. Huntley. "It is neither prejudice nor wrong impression that I have taken up. And now I have said the last word upon the matter that I shall say."

"But, sir——"

"No more, I say!" peremptorily interrupted Mr. Huntley. "The subject is over. Let us talk of other things. I need not ask whether you have news of poor Charley; you would have informed me of that at once. You see, I was right in advising silence to be kept towards them. All this time of suspense would have told badly on Mr. Channing."

Hamish rose to leave. He had done little good, it appeared, by his visit; certainly he could not wish to prolong it. "There was an unsealed scrap of paper slipped inside my father's letter," he said. "It was from my mother to Charley. This is it."

It appeared to have been written hastily, perhaps from a sudden thought at the moment of Mr. Channing's closing his letter. Mr. Huntley took it in his hand.

"My dear little Charley.—How is it you do not write to mamma? Not a message from you now—not a letter! I am sure you are not forgetting me."

"Poor boy!" exclaimed Mr. Huntley, handing it back to Hamish. "Poor mother!"

"I did not show it to Constance," observed Hamish. "It would only distress her. Good-night, sir By the way," added Hamish, turning as he reached the door, "Mr. Galloway has got that money back again."

"What money?" cried Mr. Huntley.

"That which was lost. A twenty-pound note came to him in a letter by this afternoon's post. The letter states that Arthur and all others who may have been accused are innocent."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Mr. Huntley, with cutting sarcasm, as the conviction flashed over him that Hamish, and no other, had been the sender. "The thief has come to his senses at last, has he—so far as to render lame justice to Arthur?"

Hamish left the room. The hall had not yet been lighted, and Hamish could hardly see the outline of a form crossing it from the staircase to the drawing-room. *He* knew whose it was, and he caught hold of it.

"Ellen," he whispered, "what has turned your father against me?"

Of course she could not enlighten him; she could not say to Hamish Channing, "He suspects you of being a thief." Her whole spirit would have revolted from that as much as it did from the accusation. The subject was a painful one; she was flurried at the sudden meeting—the stealthy meeting, it may be said—and she burst into tears.

I am quite afraid to say what Mr. Hamish did, this being a sober story. When he left the hall, Ellen Huntley's cheeks were glowing, and certain sweet words were ringing changes on her ears.

"Ellen, they shall never take you from me!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MUFFINS FOR TEA.

A WEEK or two passed by, and November was rapidly approaching. Things remained precisely as they were at the close of the last chapter. Nothing fresh had occurred; no change had taken place. Tom Channing's remark, though much cannot be said for its elegance, was indisputable in point of truth—that when a fellow was down he was kept down, and every dog had a fling at him. It was being exemplified in the case of Arthur. The money, so mysteriously conveyed to Mr. Galloway, had proved of little service towards clearing him; in fact, it had the contrary effect, and people openly expressed their opinion that it had come from himself or his friends. He was *down*, and it would take more than that to lift him up again. Mr. Galloway kept his thoughts to himself, or had put them into his cash-box with the note, for he said nothing. Roland Yorke did not imitate his example; he was nearly as explosive over the present matter as he had been over the loss. It would have pleased him that Arthur should be announced innocent by public proclamation. Roland was in a most explosive frame of mind on another score, and that was the confinement to the office. In reality he was not overworked, for Arthur managed to get through a good amount of it at his home, which he took in regularly, morning after morning, to Mr. Galloway. Roland, however, thought he was, and his dissatisfaction was becoming unbearable. I do not think that Roland *could* have done a hard day's work. To sit steadily to it for only a couple of hours appeared to be an absolute impossibility to his restless temperament. He must look off, he must talk, he must yawn, he must tilt his stool, he must take a slight interlude at balancing the ruler on his nose or at other similar recreative and intellectual amusements, but apply himself in earnest he could not. Therefore there was little fear of Mr. Roland's being overcome with the amount of work. But what told upon Roland was the confinement. I don't mean upon his health, you know, but his temper. It had happened many a day since Jenkins's absence that Roland had never stirred from the office except to get his dinner. He must be there in good time in the morning—at the frightfully early hour of nine—and he often did not get released till six. When he went to his dinner at one, Mr. Galloway would say, "You must be back in half an hour, Yorke; I may have to go out." Once or twice he had not gone to his dinner till two or three o'clock, and then he was half-dead with hunger. All this chafed poor Roland nearly beyond endurance. Had he been a bottle of soda-water, he would have gone off with a burst.

Another cause was rendering Roland's life not the most peaceful one. He was beginning to be seriously dunned for money. Careless in that as he was in other things, improvident as was ever Lady Augusta, Roland rarely paid till he was compelled. A very good hand was he at contracting debts, but a bad one at liquidating them. Roland did not intend to be dishonest. Were all his creditors standing around him, and a roll of bank-notes before him, he would freely have paid the lot—very probably, in his open-heartedness, have made each creditor a present over and above for "his trouble." But, failing the roll of notes, he only staved off the difficulties in the best way he could, and grew cross and ill-tempered on being applied to. His chief failing was his impulsive thoughtlessness Often when he had teased or worried Lady Augusta out of money to satisfy a debt for which he was being pressed, that very money would be expended in some passing folly, arising with the impulse of the moment, before it had had time to reach the creditor. There are too many like Roland Yorke.

Roland was late in the office one Monday evening, he and a lamp sharing it between them. He was in a terrible temper, and sat kicking his feet on the floor, as if the noise, for it might be heard in the street, would while away the time. He had nothing to do—the writing he had been about was positively finished; but he had to stop in, waiting for Mr. Galloway, who had gone out, but had not left the office for the evening. He would have given the whole world to take the pipe out of his pocket and begin to smoke; but that pastime was so firmly forbidden in the office that even Roland dared not disobey.

"There goes six of 'em!" he uttered, as the near cathedral clock rang out the hour, and his boots threatened to stave in the floor. "If I stand this life much longer, I'll be shot! It's enough to take the spirit out of a fellow, to wear his flesh off his bones, to afflict him with nervous fever. What an idiot I was to let my lady mother put me here! Better have stuck to those musty old lessons at school and gone in for a parson! Why can't Jenkins get well and come back? He's shirking it; that's my belief. And why can't Galloway get Arthur back? He might, if he pressed it. Talk of solitary confinement driving prisoners mad at their precious model prisons! What else is this? I wish I could go mad for a week, if old Galloway might be punished for it! It's worse than any prison this office! At four o'clock he went out, and now it's six, and I have not had a blessed soul put his nose inside the door to say, 'How are ye getting on?' I'm a regular prisoner, and nothing else. Why doesn't he put shackles on my legs? Why doesn't he——"

The complaint was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Galloway. Unconscious of the rebellious feelings of his clerk, he passed through the office to his own room, Roland's rat-tat-to having ceased at his appearance. To find Roland drumming on the floor with his feet was nothing unusual—rather moderate for him; Mr. Galloway *had* found him doing it with his head. Two or three minutes elapsed, and Mr. Galloway came out again.

"You can shut up, Roland. And then take these letters to the post. Put the desks straight first. What a mess you get them in! Is that will engrossed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Be here in time in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," responded Roland. "Yes! it's all very fine," he went on, as he opened the desks and shoved everything in with his two hands indiscriminately, *en masse*, which was *his* way of putting things straight. "'Be here in time!' Of course! No matter what time I am let off the previous evening. If I stand this long——"

Roland finished his sentence by an emphatic turn of the key of the office door, which expressed quite as much as words could have done, for he was already out of the room, his hat on his head, and the letters in his hand. Calling out lustily for the housekeeper, he flung the key to her, and bounded off in the direction of the post-office.

His way lay past Mrs. Jenkins's shop, which the maid had, for the hour, been left to attend to. She was doing it from a leaf taken out of Roland's own book—standing outside the door and gazing all ways. It suddenly struck Roland that he could not do better than pay Jenkins a visit, just to ascertain how long he meant to absent himself. In he darted, with his usual scant hesitation, and went on to the parlour. There was no hurry for the letters; the post did not close till nine.

The little parlour, dark by day, looked very comfortable now. A bright fire, a bright lamp, and a well-spread tea-table, at which Mrs. Jenkins sat—more comfortable than Jenkins himself did, who lay back in his easy-chair, white and wan, meekly enjoying a lecture from his wife! He started from it at the appearance of Roland, bowing in his usual humble fashion, and smiling a glad smile of welcome.

"I say, Jenkins, I have come to know how long you mean to leave us to ourselves?" was Roland's greeting.

"It's too bad, you know.—How d'ye do, Mrs. Jenkins?—Don't you look snug here? It's a nasty cutting night, and I have got to tramp all the way to the post-office."

Free and easy Roland drew a chair forward on the opposite side of the hearth to Jenkins, Mrs. Jenkins and her good things being in the middle, and warmed his hands over the blaze. "Ugh!" he shivered, "I can't bear these keen, easterly winds. It's fine to be you, Jenkins, basking by a blazing fire, and junketing upon plates of buttered muffins!"

"Would you please to condescend to take a cup of tea with us, sir?" was Jenkins's answer. "It is just ready."

"I don't care if I do," said Roland. "There's nothing I like better than buttered muffins. We get them sometimes at home; but there's so many to eat at our house that before a plate is well in, a dozen hands are snatching at it, and it's emptied. Lady Augusta knows no more of comfort than a cow, and *will* have the whole tribe of young ones in to meals."

"You'll find these muffins different from what you get at home," said Mrs. Jenkins in her curt, snappish, but really not inhospitable way, as she handed the muffins to Roland. "I know what it is when things are left to servants, as they are at your place; they turn out uneatable—soddened things, with rancid butter put on 'em nine times out of ten, instead of good, wholesome fresh. Servants' cooking won't do for Jenkins now, and it never did for me."

"These are good, though!" exclaimed Roland, eating away with intense satisfaction. "Have you got any more downstairs? Mrs. Jenkins, don't I wish you could always toast muffins for me! Is that some ham?"

His eyes had caught a small dish of ham, in delicate slices, put there to tempt poor Jenkins. But he was growing beyond such tempting now, for his appetite wholly failed him. It was upon this point he had been undergoing Mrs. Jenkins's displeasure when Roland interrupted them. The question led to an excellent opportunity for the renewing of the grievance, and she was too persistent a diplomatist to let it slip. Catching hold of the dish, and leaving her chair, she held it out underneath the eyes of Roland.

"Young Mr. Yorke, do you see anything the matter with that ham? Please to tell me."

"I see that it looks uncommon good," replied Roland.

"Do you hear?" sharply ejaculated Mrs. Jenkins, turning short round upon her husband.

"My dear, I never said a word but what it was good; I never had any other thought," returned he with deprecation. "I only said that I could not eat it. I can't—indeed, I can't! My appetite is gone."

Mrs. Jenkins put the dish down upon the table with a jerk. "That's how he goes on!" said she to Roland. "It's enough to wear a woman's patience out! I get him muffins, I get him ham, I get him fowls, I get him fish, I get him puddings, I get him every conceivable nicety that I can think of, and not a thing will he touch. All the satisfaction I can get from him is that his stomach turns against food."

"I wish I could eat," interposed Jenkins mildly. "I have tried to do it till I can try no longer. I wish I could."

"Will you take some of this ham, young Mr. Yorke?" she asked. "*He* won't. He wants to know what scarcity of food is!"

"I'll take it all if you like," said Roland, "if it's going begging."

Mrs. Jenkins accommodated him with a plate and knife and fork, and with some more muffins. Roland did ample justice to the whole, dispatching it down with about six cups of good tea, well sugared and creamed. Jenkins looked on with satisfaction, and Mrs. Jenkins appeared to regard it in the light of a personal compliment to herself, as acting chief of the commissariat department.

"And now," said Roland, turning back to the fire, "when are you coming out again, Jenkins?"

Jenkins coughed—more in hesitation for an answer than of necessity. "I am beginning to think, sir, that I shall not get out again at all," he presently said.

"Halloa! I say, Jenkins, don't go and talk that rubbish!" was Roland's reply. "You know what I told you once about that dropsy. I heard of a man that took it into his head to fancy himself dead. And he ordered a coffin, and lay down in it, and stopped in it for six days, only getting up at night to steal the bread and cheese! His folks couldn't think at first where the loaves went to. You'll be fancying the same if you don't mind!"

"If I could only get a little stronger, sir, instead of weaker, I should soon be at my duty again. I am anxious enough, sir, as you may imagine, for there's my salary, sir, coming to me as usual, and I doing nothing for it."

"It's just this, Jenkins, that if you don't come back speedily I shall take French leave, and be off some fine morning. I can't stand it much longer. I can't tell you how many blessed hours at a stretch am I in that office with nobody to speak to. I *wish* I was at Port Natal!"

"Sir," said Jenkins, thinking he would say a word of warning in his kindly spirit, "I have heard that there's nothing more deceptive to the mind than those foreign parts that people flock to when the rage arises for them. Many a man only goes out to starve and die."

"Many a muff, you mean!" returned self-complaisant Roland. "I say, Jenkins, isn't it a shame about Arthur Channing? Galloway has got his money back from the very thief himself, as the letter said, and yet the old grumbler won't speak out like a man, and say, 'Shake hands, old fellow,' and, 'I know you are innocent, and come back to the office again.' Arthur would return if he said that. See if I don't start for Port Natal!"

"I wish Mr. Arthur was back again, sir. It would make me easier."

"He sits and stews and frets and worries his brains about that office, and how it gets on without him!" tartly interposed Mrs. Jenkins. "A sick man can't expect to grow better if he is to pine himself into fiddle-strings!"

"I wish," repeated poor Jenkins in a dreamy sort of mood, his eyes fixed on the fire, and his thin hands clasped upon his knees—"I do wish Mr. Arthur was back. In a little while he'd quite replace me, and I should not be missed."

"Hear him!" uttered Mrs. Jenkins. "That's how he goes on!"

"Well," concluded Roland, rising, and gathering up his letters, which he had deposited upon a side-table, "if this is not a nice part of the world to live in, I don't know what is! Arthur Channing kept down under Galloway's shameful injustice; Jenkins making out that things are all over with him; and I driven off my head doing everybody's work! Good-night, Jenkins.—Good-night, Mrs. J. That was a stunning tea! I'll come in again some night when you have got toasted muffins!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

A CHÂTEAU EN ESPAGNE.

A KEEN wind, blowing from the east, was booming through the streets of Helstonleigh, striking pitilessly the eyes and cheeks of the wayfarers, cutting thin forms nearly in two, and taking stout ones off their legs.

Blinded by the sharp dust, giving hard words to the wind, to the cold, to the post-office for not being nearer, to anything and everything, Roland Yorke dashed along, suffering nothing and nobody to impede his progress. He flung the letters into the box at the post-office when he reached that establishment, and then set off at the same pace back again.

Roland was in a state of inward commotion. He thought himself the most injured, the most hard-worked, the most-to-be-pitied fellow under the sun. The confinement in the office, with the additional work he had to get through there, was the chief grievance; and a grievance it really was to one of Roland's temperament. When he had Arthur Channing and Jenkins for his companions in it, to whom he could talk as he pleased, and who did all the work, allowing Roland to do all the play, it had been tolerably bearable; but that state of things was changed, and Roland was feeling that he could bear it no longer.

Another thing that Roland would perhaps be allowed to bear no longer was—immunity from his debts. *They* had grown on him latterly as much as the work had. Careless Roland saw no way out of that difficulty any more than he did out of the other, save by an emigration to that desired haven which had stereotyped itself on the retina of his imagination in colours of the brightest fantasy—Port Natal. For its own sake Roland was hurrying to get to it, as well as that it might be convenient to do so.

"Look here," said he to himself as he tore along, "even if Carrick were to set me all clear and straight—and I dare say he might, if I told him the bother I am in—where would be the good? It would not forward me. I'd not stop at Galloway's another month to be made into a duke royal. If he'd take back Arthur with honours, and Jenkins came out of his cough and his shadowiness and returned, I don't know but I might do my inclination violence and remain. I can't as it is. I should go dead with the worry and the work."

Roland paused, fighting for an instant with a gust of wind and grit. Then he resumed,—

"I'd pay the debts if I could; but if I can't, what am I to do but leave them unpaid? Much better get the money from Carrick to start me off to Port Natal, and set me going there. Then, when I have made enough, I'll send the cash to Arthur, and get him to settle up for me. I don't want to cheat the poor wretches out of their money; I'd rather pay 'em double than do that. Some of them work hard enough to get it—almost as hard as I do at Galloway's—and they have a right to their own. In three months' time after landing, I shall be able to do the thing liberally. I'll make up my mind from to-night and go; I know it will be all for the best. Besides, there's the other thing."

What the "other thing" might mean Mr. Roland did not more explicitly state. He came to another pause, and then went on again,—

"That's settled. I'll tell my lady to-night, and I'll tell Galloway in the morning; and I'll fix on the time for starting, and be off to London, and see what I can do with Carrick. Let's see! I shall want to take out lots of things. I can get them in London. When Bagshaw went he told me of about a thousand. I think I dotted them down somewhere; I must look. Rum odds and ends they were; I know frying-pans were amongst them. Carrick will go with me to buy them, if I ask him; and then he'll pay, if it's only out of politeness. Nobody sticks out for politeness more than Carrick. He——"

Roland's castles in the air were suddenly cut short. He was passing a dark part near the cathedral, when a rough hand—rough in texture, not in motion—was laid upon his shoulder, and a peculiar piece of paper thrust upon him. The assailant was Hopper, the sheriff's officer.

Roland flew into one of his passions. He divined what it was perfectly well—nothing less than one of those little mandates from our Sovereign Lady the Queen, which, a short while back, had perilled Hamish Channing. He repaid Hopper with a specimen of his tongue, and flung the writ back at him.

"Now, sir, where's the good of your abusing me, as if it was my fault?" returned the man in a tone of reasoning remonstrance. "I have had it in my pocket this three weeks, Mr. Yorke, and not a day but I could have served it on you; but I'm loath to trouble young gentlemen such as you, as I'm sure many of you in this town could say. I have got into displeasure with our folk about the delay in this very paper, and—in short, sir, I have not done it till I was obliged."

"You old preacher!" foamed Roland. "I have not tipped you with half a crown lately, and therefore you can see me!"

"Mr. Yorke," said the man earnestly, "if you had filled my hands with half-crowns yesterday, I must have done this to-day. I tell you, sir, I have got into a row with our people over it, and it's the truth. Why don't you, sir—if I may presume to give advice—tell out your little embarrassments to your mother, the Lady Augusta? She'd be sure to see you through them."

"How dare you mention the Lady Augusta to me?" thundered haughty Roland. "Is it fitting that the Lady Augusta's name should be bandied in such transactions as these? Do you think I don't know what's due to her better than that? If I have got into embarrassment, I shall not drag my mother into it."

"Well, sir, you know best. I did not mean to offend you, but the contrary. Mind, Mr. Roland Yorke!" added Hopper, pointing to the writ, which still lay where it had been flung, "you can leave it there if you choose, sir, but I have served it upon you."

Hopper went his way. Roland caught up the paper, tore it to pieces with his strong hands, and tossed them after the man. The wind took up the quarrel, and scattered the pieces indiscriminately to the four compasses. Roland strode on.

"What a mercy that there's a Port Natal to be off to!" was his comment.

Things were not particularly promising at home when Roland entered, looking at them in a quiet, sociable point of view. Lady Augusta was spending the evening at the deanery, and the children, from Gerald downwards, were turning the general parlour into a bear-garden. Romping, quarrelling, shouting, and screaming, they were really as unrestrained as so many young bears. It would often be no better when Lady Augusta was at home. How Gerald and Tod contrived to do their lessons amidst it was a marvel to everybody. Roland administered a few cuffs to enjoin silence, and then went out again, he did not much care where. His feet took him to the house of his friend Knivett, with whom he spent a pleasant evening, the topics of conversation turning chiefly upon the glories of Port Natal and Roland's recent adventure with Hopper. Had anything been wanted to put the finishing touch to Roland's resolution, that little adventure would have supplied it.

It was past ten when he returned home. The noisy throng had dispersed then, all save Gerald. Gerald had just accomplished his tasks, and was now gracefully enjoying a little repose before the fire, his head on the back of my lady's low embroidered chair, and his feet extended on either hob.

"What's for supper?" asked Roland, turning his eyes on the cloth, which bore traces that a party, and not a scrupulously tidy one, had already partaken of that meal.

"Bones," said Gerald.

"Bones!" echoed Roland.

"Bones," rejoined Gerald. "They made a show of broiling some downstairs, but they took good care to cut off the meat first. Where all the meat goes to in this house I can't think. If a good half of the leg of mutton didn't go down from dinner to-day, I possessed no eyes."

"They are not going to put me off with bones," said Roland, ringing the bell. "When a man's worked within an ace of his life he must eat. Martha"—when the maid appeared—"I want some supper."

"There's no meat in the house, sir. There were some broiled bo——"

"You may eat the bones yourself," interrupted Roland. "I never saw such a house as this! Loads of provisions come into it, and yet there's rarely anything to be had when it's wanted. You must go and order me some oysters. Get four dozen. I am famished. If I hadn't had a substantial tea supplied me out of charity, I should be fainting before this! It's a shame! I wonder my lady puts up with you two incapable servants."

"There are no oysters to be had at this time, Mr. Roland," returned Martha, who was accustomed to these interludes touching the housekeeping. "The shop shuts up at ten."

Roland beat on the floor with the heel of his boot. Then he turned round fiercely to Martha. "Is there *nothing* in the house that's eatable?"

"There's an apple pie, sir."

"Bring that then. And while I am going into it the cook can do me some eggs and ham."

Gerald had turned round at this, angry in his turn. "If there's an apple pie, Martha, why could you not have produced it for our supper? You know we were obliged to put up with cheese and butter!"

"The cook told me not to bring it up, Master Gerald. My lady gave no orders. Cook says if she made ten pies a day, they'd get eaten, once you young gentlemen knew of their being in the house."

"Well?" said Gerald. "She doesn't provide them out of her pocket."

Roland paid his court to the apple pie, Gerald joining him. After it was finished, they kept the cook employed some time with the eggs and ham. Then Gerald, who had to be up betimes for morning school, went to bed; and I only hope he did not get the nightmare.

Roland took up his place before the fire in the same chair and position vacated by Gerald. Thus he waited for Lady Augusta. It was not long before she came in.

"Come and sit down a bit, good mother," said Roland. "I want to talk to you."

"My dear, I am not in a talking humour," she answered. "My head aches, and I shall be glad to get to bed. It was a stupid, humdrum evening"

She was walking to the side-table to light her bed-candle, but Roland interposed. He drew the couch close to the fire, settled his mother in it, and took his seat with her. She asked him what he had to say so particularly that night.

"I am going to tell you what it is. But don't you fly out at me, mother dear," he coaxingly added. "I find I can't get along here at all, mother, and I shall be off to Port Natal."

Lady Augusta did fly out—with a scream, and a start from her seat. Roland pulled her into it again.

"Now, mother, just listen to me quietly. I can't bear my life at Galloway's. I can't do the work. If I stopped at it, I'm not sure but I should do something desperate. You'd not like to see your son turn jockey, and ride in a pink silk jacket and yellow breeches on the racecourse; and you'd not like to see him enlist for a soldier, or run away for a sailor? Well, worse than that might come if I stopped at Galloway's. Taking it at the very best, I should only get worked into my grave."

"I will not hear another word, Roland," interrupted Lady Augusta. "How can you be so wicked and ungrateful?"

"What is there wicked in it?" asked Roland. "Besides, you don't know all. I can't tell you what I don't owe in Helstonleigh, and I've not got sixpence to pay it. You'd not like to see me marched off to prison, mother."

Lady Augusta gave another shriek.

"And there's a third reason why I wish to be away," went on Roland, drowning the noise. "But I'll not go into that, because it concerns myself alone."

Of course the announcement that it concerned himself alone only made my lady the more inquisitive to hear it. She peremptorily ordered Roland to disclose it to her.

But Roland could be as peremptory as she, and he declined, in positive terms, to explain further.

"It would not afford you any pleasure, mother," he said, "and I should not have mentioned it but as an additional reason why I must be off."

"You unhappy boy! You have been doing something dreadful!"

"It's not over good," acknowledged Roland. "Perhaps I'll write you word all about it from London. I have not smothered William Yorke, or set old Galloway's office on fire, and those respected gentlemen are my two *bêtes noires*. So don't look so scared, mother."

"Roland!" uttered Lady Augusta, as the fact struck her, "if you go off in this manner, all the money that was paid with you to Mr. Galloway will be lost! I might as well have sent it down the gutter."

"So I said at the time," answered cool Roland. "Never mind that, mother. What's that paltry hundred or two compared to the millions I shall make? And as to these folks that I owe money to——"

"They'll be coming upon me," interposed Lady Augusta. "Heaven knows, *I* have enough to pay."

"They will do nothing of the sort," said Roland. "You have no legal right to pay my debts. Not one of them but has been contracted since I was of age. If they come to you, tell them so."

"Roland, Lord Carrick gave you money once or twice when he was here," resumed Lady Augusta. "I know he did. What have you done with it all?"

"Money melts," responded Roland. "Upon my word and honour, then, I do believe it must melt at times; it vanishes so quickly."

My lady could not cavil at the assertion. She was only too much given to the same belief herself. Roland continued,—

"In a little while—about three months, as I calculate—after my arrival at Port Natal, I shall be in a position to send funds home to pay what I owe; and be assured I will faithfully send them. There is the finest opening, mother, at Port Natal! Fortunes are being made there daily. In a few years' time I shall come home with my pockets lined, and shall settle down by you for life."

"If I could but think the prospect was so good a one!" exclaimed Lady Augusta.

"It *is*," said Roland emphatically. "Why, mother, Port Natal is all the rage; hundreds are going out. Were there no reasons to urge me away, you would be doing the most unwise thing possible to stand in the light of my going. If I were at something that I liked, that I was not worked to death at; if I did not owe a shilling; if my prospects here, in short, were first-rate, and my life a bower of rose leaves, I should do well to throw it all up for Port Natal."

"But in what manner are these great fortunes made?" wondered Lady Augusta.

"Of course, I shall acquire all that information. Stuck in this know-nothing Helstonleigh, I can only state the fact that they *are* made. I dare say I can find an opening for one or two of the boys out there."

Lady Augusta, persuadable as ever was a child, began to look upon the plan with less prejudiced eyes, as Roland would have styled it. As to Roland, so fully had he become imbued with the golden harvest to be gathered at Port Natal, that had an angel descended to undeceive him, he would have refused to listen.

"There will be the losing you, Roland," said Lady Augusta, hesitating whether she should scold or cry.

"Law, what's that?" returned Roland slightingly. "You'll get over that in a day, and return thanks that there's one source of trouble less. Look here! If I were in the luck of having a good commission given me in some crack Indian regiment, would you not say, 'Oh, be joyful,' and start me off at once? What are you the worse for George's being away? Mother!" he added somewhat passionately, "*would* you like to see me tied down for life to an old proctor's office?"

"But, Roland, you cannot go out without money. There'll be your outfit and your passage; and you can't land with empty pockets."

"As to an outfit," said Roland, "you must not run your head upon such a one as George had. A few new shirts, and a pair or two of waterproof boots—that will be about all I shall want. I remember shirts and waterproof boots were mentioned by Bagshaw. What I shall mostly want to buy will be tools and household utensils—frying-pans, and items of that sort."

"Frying-pans!" ejaculated Lady Augusta.

"I am sure frying-pans were mentioned," answered Roland. "Perhaps it was only one, though, for private use. I'll hunt up Bagshaw's list and look it over."

"And where's the money to come from?" repeated my lady.

"I shall get it of Lord Carrick. I know he'll give me what I want. I often talked to him about Port Natal when he was here."

"I had a letter from him to-day," said Lady Augusta. "He will be returning to Ireland next week."

"Will he, though?" uttered Roland, aroused by the information. "I have no time to lose, then."

"Well, Roland, I must hear more about this to-morrow, and consider it over," said my lady, rising to retire. "I have not said yet you are to go, mind."

"I shall go whether you say it or not," replied frank Roland. "And when I come home with my pockets lined, a rich man for life, the first thing I'll buy shall be a case of diamonds for you."

"Stupid boy!" said she, laughing. "I shall be too old to wear diamonds then."

"Oh no, you won't."

My lady gave him a hearty kiss, and went to bed and to sleep. The visions of Roland were not without their effect upon her, and she had a most delightful dream of driving about in a charming city, whose streets were paved with malachite marble, brilliant to look upon. How many times Roland had dreamt that Port Natal was paved with *gold*, he alone knew.

Had Roland been troubled with over-sensitiveness in regard to other people's feelings, and felt himself at a loss how to broach the matter to Mr Galloway, he might have been pleased to find that the way was, in a degree, paved to him. On the following morning Mr. Galloway was at the office considerably before his usual hour—consequently, before Roland Yorke. Upon looking over Roland's work of the previous day, he found that a deed—a deed that was in a hurry, too—had been imperfectly drawn out, and would have to be done over again. The cause must have been sheer carelessness, and Mr. Galloway naturally felt angered. When the gentleman arrived, he told him what he thought of his conduct, winding up the reproaches with a declaration that Roland did him no service at all, and would be as well out of the office as in it.

"I am glad of that, sir," was Roland's answer. "What I was about to tell you will make no difference, then. I wish to leave, sir."

"Do you?" retorted Mr. Galloway.

"I am going to leave, sir," added Roland, rather improving upon the assertion. "I am going to Port Natal."

Mr. Galloway was a little taken aback. "Going to where?" cried he.

"To Port Natal."

"To Port Natal!" echoed Mr. Galloway in unbounded astonishment, for not an inkling of Roland's long-thought-of project had ever reached him. "What on earth should you want there?"

"To make my fortune," replied Roland.

"Oh!" said Mr. Galloway. "When do you start?"

"It is quite true, sir," continued Roland. "Of course I could not go without informing you."

"Do you start to-day?" repeated Mr. Galloway in the same mocking tone.

"No, I don't," said Roland. "But I *shall* start, sir, before long, and I beg you to believe me. I have talked Lady Augusta over to the plan, and I shall get the money for it from Lord Carrick. I might drum on here all my life and never rise to be anything better than a proctor, besides having my life worked out of me; whereas, if I can get to Port Natal, my fortune's made. Hundreds and thousands of enterprising spirits are emigrating there, and they are all going to make their fortunes."

Had Mr. Galloway not been angry, he would have laughed outright. "Yorke," said he, "did you ever hear of a sickness that fell suddenly upon this kingdom some years ago?

It was called the gold fever. Hundreds and thousands, as you phrase it, caught the mania, and flocked out to the Australian gold-diggings to 'make their fortunes' by picking up gold. Boy!"—laying his hand on Roland's shoulder—"how many of those, think you, instead of making their fortunes, only went out TO DIE?"

"That was not Port Natal, sir."

"It was not. But, unless some of you wild young men come to your senses, we shall have a second edition of the Australian madness at Port Natal. Nothing can be more futile than these visionary schemes, Roland Yorke; they are like the apples of Sodom—fair and promising to the eye, full of ashes to the taste. Do not you be deceived by them."

"One *must* get on at Port Natal, sir."

"If one does not get 'off,'" returned Mr. Galloway in a cynical tone that chafed Roland's ear. "The stream that flocked out to the gold-diggings all thought they should get on; each individual was fully persuaded that he should come home in a year or two with a plum in each of his breeches pockets. Where one made his way, Roland—made wealth—many starved, died, vanished, it was not known how—were never heard of by their friends more, or saw old England again. What good do you suppose *you* could do at Port Natal?"

"I intend to do a great deal," said Roland.

"But suppose you found you could do none—suppose it, I say—what would become of you out in a strange place, without money and without friends?"

"Well," returned Roland, who was never at a loss for an answer, "if such an impossible thing as a failure were to turn up, I should come back to my Uncle Carrick, and make him start me in something else."

"Ah!" mockingly observed Mr. Galloway, "a rolling stone gathers no moss. Meanwhile, Mr. Roland Yorke, suppose you come down from the clouds to your proper business. Draw out this deed again, and see if you can accomplish it to a little more purpose than you did yesterday."

Roland, liking the tone less and less, sat down and grew sullen. "Don't say I did not give you notice, sir," he observed.

But Mr. Galloway vouchsafed no reply. Indeed, it may be questioned if he heard the remark, for he went into his own room at the moment Roland spoke, and shut the door after him.

"Mocking old caterpillar!" grumbled angry Roland. "No fortunes at Port Natal! I'd go off if it was only to tantalize *him!*"

CHAPTER L.

REALLY GONE!

MRS. JENKINS had many virtues. Besides the cardinal one which has been particularly brought under the reader's notice—that of keeping her husband in due subjection—she also possessed in an eminent degree the excellent quality of being a most active housewife. In fact, she had the bump of rule and order, and personally superintended everything—with hands and tongue.

Amongst other careful habits was that of never letting anybody put a finger on her best sitting-room, for the purpose of cleaning it, except herself. She called it her drawing-room—a small, pretty room over the shop, very well furnished. It was let to Mr. Harper, with the bedroom behind it. Had Lydia dared even to wipe the dust off a table, it might have cost her her place. Mrs. Jenkins was wont to slip her old buff dressing-gown over her clothes, after she was dressed in a morning, and betake herself to this drawing-room. Twice a week it was carefully swept, and on those occasions a large green handkerchief, tied cornerwise upon Mrs. Jenkins's head, to save her cap from dust, was added to her costume.

On the morning following Roland's communication to Mr. Galloway, Mrs. Jenkins was thus occupied, a dust-pan in one hand, a short hand-broom in the other—for you may be sure she did not sweep *her* carpets with those long, slashing, tear-away brooms that wear out a carpet in six months—and the green kerchief adjusted gracefully over her ears, when she heard a man's footsteps clattering up the stairs. In much astonishment as to who could have invaded the house at that hour, Mrs. Jenkins rose up from her knees and flung open the door.

It was Roland Yorke, coming up at the top of his speed, with a carpet-bag in his hand. "Whatever do you want?" exclaimed she. "Is anything the matter?"

"The matter is that I want to say a word to Jenkins," replied Roland. "I know he must be in bed, so I just ran straight through the shop and up."

"I'm sure you are very polite!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins. "For all you knew, I might have been in the room."

"So you might!" cried easy Roland. "I never thought of that. I should not have swallowed you, Mrs. Jenkins. Take care! I have hardly a minute to spare. I shall lose the train."

On he went, up the second flight of stairs, without the slightest hesitation, and into Jenkins's room, ignoring the ceremony of knocking. Poor Jenkins, who had heard the colloquy, and recognized Roland's voice, was waiting for him with wondering eyes.

"I am off, Jenkins," said Roland, advancing and bending over the bed. "I wouldn't go without just saying a word to you."

"Off where, sir?" returned Jenkins, who could not have looked more bewildered had he been suddenly aroused from sleep.

"To Port Natal. I am sick and tired of everything here, so I'm off at last."

Jenkins was struck dumb. Of course, the first thought that passed through his mind was Mr. Galloway's discomfiture, unless he had prepared for it. "This is very sudden, sir!" he cried, when speech came to him. "Who is replacing you at the office?"

"Nobody," replied Roland. "That's the primest bit in the whole play. Galloway will know what work is now. I told him yesterday morning that I should go, but he went into a tantrum, and didn't take it in earnest. He pointed out to me about sixty things as my day's work to-day when he left the office last night—errands to go upon, and writings to do, and answers to give, and the office to mind! A glorious commotion there'll be when he finds it's all thrown upon his own hands. He'll see how *he* likes work!"

Jenkins could do nothing but stare. Roland went on,—

"I have just slipped round there now to leave a message with my compliments. It will turn his hair green when he hears it, and finds I am really gone. Do you feel any better, Jenkins?"

The question was put in a different tone—a soft, gentle tone—one in which Roland rarely spoke. He had never seen Jenkins look so ill as he was looking now.

"I shall never feel any better in this world, sir."

"Well, give us your hand, Jenkins; I must be off. You are the only one, old fellow, that I have said good-bye to. You have been a good lot, Jenkins, and done things for me that other clerks would not. Good luck to you, old chap, whether you go into the next world or whether you stop in this!"

"God bless you, Mr. Roland! God bless you everywhere!"

Roland leapt down the stairs. Mrs. Jenkins stood at the drawing-room door. "Good-bye," said he to her. "You see I should not have had time to eat you. What d'ye call that thing you have got upon your head, Mrs. Jenkins? Only wear it to church next Sunday, and you'll set the fashion."

Away he tore to the station. The first person he saw there, officials excepted, was Hamish Channing, who had gone to it for the purpose of seeing a friend off by the train. The second was Lady Augusta Yorke.

Hamish he saw first as he was turning away from getting his ticket. "Hamish," said he, "you'll tell Arthur that I did not come round to him for a last word; I shall write it from London."

"Roland"—and Hamish spoke more gravely than was his wont—"you are starting upon a wild-goose scheme."

"It is *not*," said Roland. "Why do you preach up nonsense? If the worst came to the worst, I should come back to Carrick, and he'd set me on my legs again. I tell you, Hamish, I have a hundred reasons to urge me away from Helstonleigh."

"Is this carpet-bag all your luggage?"

"All I am taking with me. The rest will be sent afterwards. Had I dispatched the bellman about the town to announce my departure, I might have got stopped; so I have told nobody except poor, harmless Jenkins."

Of course it never occurred to proud and improvident Roland that it was possible to travel in any carriage but a first-class one. A first-class ticket he took, and into a first-class compartment he got. Fortunate it was that it was an empty one. Hamish was filling up the door, talking to him, when sounds of distress were heard coming swiftly along the platform. Before Hamish had time to look what caused them, they were close upon his ear, and he found himself vehemently pushed aside, just as Roland himself might have pushed him. He turned with surprise. Panting, breathless, in tears, wailing out that she should never see her darling son again, stood the Lady Augusta Yorke.

What could be the cause of her appearance there in that state? The cause was Roland. On the previous day he had held a second conversation with his mother, picturing the glories of Port Natal in colours so vivid that the thought nearly crossed my lady's mind, Couldn't she go too, and make *her* fortune? She then inquired when he meant to start. "Oh," answered Roland carelessly, "between now and a week's time." The real fact was that he contemplated being away on the following morning, before my lady was up. Roland's motive was not an unfilial one. He knew how she excited herself over these partings—the violent, if short, grief to which she gave the reins; he remembered what it had been on the departure of his brother George. One other motive also held weight with him, and induced reticence. It was very desirable, remembering that he was not perfectly free from claims upon his purse, that he should depart, if not absolutely *sub rosâ*, still without its being extensively known; and that, he knew, would be next door to an impossibility were the exact period imparted to my lady. Lady Augusta Yorke could not have kept a secret for a single hour had it been to save her life. Accordingly, she retired to rest in blissful ignorance; and in ignorance she might have remained until he was fairly off, but for Roland's own want of caution. Up with daylight—and daylight, you know, does not surprise us too early when the dark days of November are close at hand—Roland began turning over his drawers and closets, to pick out the few articles he meant to carry with him; the rest would be packed afterwards. This aroused his mother, whose room was underneath his, and she angrily wondered what he could be doing. Not for some time, until after the noise ceased, did the faintest suspicion of the truth break upon her; and it might not then, but for the sudden remembrance which rose in her mind of Roland's particularly affectionate farewell the night previously. Lady Augusta rang her bell.

"Do you know what Mr. Roland is about in his room?" she inquired when Martha answered it.

"Mr. Roland is gone out, my lady," was Martha's reply. "He came down in the kitchen and drank a cup of coffee, and then went out with a carpet-bag."

Lady Augusta became excited. "Where's he gone?" she wildly asked.

"Somewhere by rail, I think, my lady. He said, as he drank his coffee, that he hoped our heads wouldn't ache till he saw us again. Cook and me couldn't think what he meant, my lady."

My lady divined only too well. She gave a prolonged series of shrieks, jumped out of bed, flung on any clothes that came uppermost, and started in pursuit of him, to the intense wonder of Martha and to the astonishment of Helstonleigh, as she flew wildly through the streets to the station. The sight of Hamish at a carriage-door guided her to her runagate son.

She sprang into the carriage—it was well, I say, that it was empty!—and overwhelmed him with a torrent of reproaches, all the while kissing and hugging him. Not two minutes could be given to their farewell, for the time was up, and Lady Augusta had to descend again, weeping bitterly.

"Take care of her home, Hamish," said Roland, putting his head out. "Mother dear, you'll live to say I have done well yet. You'll see me come home one of these fine days, with a covered wagon after me, bringing the bags of gold." Poor Roland!

The train steamed off, and Lady Augusta, to the discomfiture of Hamish and admiration of the porters and station boys, set off at full speed after it, wringing her hands, and tearing her hair, and sobbing and shrieking out that "she'd go—she'd go with it; that she should never see her darling boy again!" With some difficulty Hamish soothed her down to tolerable calmness, and put her into a fly.

They were scarcely beyond the station when she suddenly bent forward to Hamish, who sat on the seat opposite to her, and seized his hands. "Is it true that everybody gets rich who goes to Port Natal?"

The question was a poser for sunny Hamish. He liked to scatter flowers in his path rather than thorns. How could he tell that grieving woman that Roland—careless, lazy, improvident Roland—would be almost sure to return in a worse plight than he had gone? "I have heard of people doing well at Port Natal," he answered; "and Roland is young and strong, and has years before him."

"I cannot think how so much money can be made," continued my lady, beginning to dry her tears. "There are no goldfields there, are there ?"

"I think not," said Hamish.

"They must trade, then, I suppose. And, goodness me! what does Roland know about trading ? Nothing. He talks of taking out tools and frying-pans."

"Frying-pans !" repeated Hamish, struck with the item.

"I am sure he said frying-pans. Oh, dear !" sobbed Lady Augusta, "what a relief it would be if folks never had any children, or if boys did not possess wills of their own ! Hamish, you have never given sorrow to *your* mother ! I feel that you have not !"

Hamish smiled at her. "Now you know, Lady Augusta, that your children are your dearest treasures," cried he soothingly. "You would be the most unhappy woman living if you had none."

"Ah, you can't judge, Mr. Hamish Channing. You have no children of your own."

"No," said Hamish, laughing, "but my turn may come some day. Dear Lady Augusta, if Roland has his faults, he has his good qualities. Look on the bright side of things. Look forward with hope to the time that you shall see him home safe and well again. It will be sure to come."

"You speak as if you believed it would."

"Of course I do," said Hamish. "And everybody finds me a true prophet."

They were then passing the Hazeldon charity. At the iron gates of the enclosure, talking to an old man, stood the Reverend William Yorke. "Roland left a message for him !" exclaimed Hamish half mockingly, as his eyes fell upon the clergyman.

Lady Augusta, all impulse ever, suddenly put her head out at the window and stopped the fly. William Yorke, looking surprised to see who were its inmates, advanced to the door. The lady's tears flowed afresh.

"He is gone, William ! My darling, self-willed, troublesome boy is gone, and I shall perhaps never see him more till I am an old woman."

"Who is gone ?" returned Mr. Yorke.

"Roland. Never was a mother so tried as I. He will soon be on the sea, ploughing his way to Port Natal. I wish there was no sea, no Port Natals ! He went off without saying a word to me, and he is GONE !"

Mr. Yorke, bewildered, turned his eyes on Hamish for explanation. He had never heard of the Port Natal project. Hamish nodded in confirmation.

"The best place for him," said Mr. Yorke. "He must work for his bread there before he eats it."

Lady Augusta shrieked, "How cruelly hard you are, William!"

"Not hard, Lady Augusta—kind," he gently said. "If your boys were brought up to depend upon their own exertions more, they would make better men."

"You said you had a message for him from Roland?" resumed Lady Augusta, looking at Hamish.

Hamish smiled significantly. "Not much of one," he said, and his lips, as he bent towards William Yorke, assumed an expression of sarcastic severity. "He merely requested me, after he was in the train, to give his love to the Reverend Mr. Yorke as a parting legacy."

Either the words or the tone, probably the latter, struck on the Reverend Mr. Yorke's self-esteem and flushed his cheek crimson. Since the rupture with Constance, Hamish, though not interfering in the remotest degree, had maintained a tone of quiet sarcasm to Mr. Yorke. And though Mr. Yorke did not like it, he could not hinder it.

"When does Mr. Channing return?" he abruptly asked of Hamish.

"We shall be expecting him shortly now."

Lady Augusta gave the signal for the fly to drive on. William Yorke put his hand over the door and took hers as the man began to whip up his horse.

"Do not grieve too much after him, Lady Augusta. It may prove to be the best day's work Roland ever did. God has given him hands and brains, and a good heart, as I verily believe. If he shall only learn their value out there, let his lines be ever so hard, he may come home a wise and a good man. One of my poor pensioners here said to me, not ten minutes ago, 'I was brought to know my Saviour, sir, through hard lines.' Lady Augusta, those 'hard lines' are never sent in vain."

CHAPTER LI.

AN ARRIVAL IN A FLY.

WAS anybody ever so ill-used as that unfortunate Mr. Galloway? On the morning which witnessed his troublesome clerk's departure he sat rather longer than usual over his breakfast, never dreaming of the calamity in store for him. That his thoughts were given to business there was no doubt, for his newspaper lay untouched. In point of fact, his mind was absorbed by the difficulties which had arisen in his office, and the ways and means by which those difficulties might be best remedied.

That it would be impossible to get on with Roland Yorke alone, he had said to himself twenty times; and now he was saying it again, little supposing, poor unconscious man, that even Roland, bad as he was, had taken flight. He had never intended to get along with only Roland, but circumstances had induced him to attempt doing so for a time. In the first place, he had entertained hopes, until very recently, that Jenkins would recover; in the second place, failing Jenkins, there was nobody in the wide world he would so soon have in his office as Arthur Channing—provided that Arthur could prove his innocence. With Arthur and Roland he could go on very well, or with Jenkins and Roland; but poor Jenkins appeared to be getting beyond hope, and Arthur's innocence was no nearer the light than it had been, in spite of that strange coming back to him of the money. Moreover, Arthur had declined to return to the office, even to help with the copying, preferring to take it home. All these reflections were pressing upon the mind of Mr. Galloway.

"I'll wait no longer," said he, as he brought them to a conclusion. "I'll go this very day after that young Bartlett. I think he might suit, with some drilling. If he turns out a second Yorke, I shall have a nice pair upon my hands. But he can't well turn out as bad as Roland; he comes of a more business-like stock."

This point settled, Mr. Galloway took up the *Times*. Something in its pages awoke his interest, and he sat longer over it than it had been his wont to do since the departure of Jenkins. It was twenty minutes past nine by his watch when he started for his office.

"Now I wonder how I shall find that gentleman," soliloquized he, when he drew near. "Amusing himself as usual, of course. He'll have made a show of putting out the papers, and there they will be, lying unopened. He'll be at Aunt Sally with the letters, or dancing a quadrille with the stools, or got himself stretched three parts out of the window, saluting the passengers. I never thought he'd do me much good, and should not have taken him but for the respect I owed the late Dr. Yorke. Now for it!"

It was all very well for Mr. Galloway to say, "Now for it," and to put his hand stealthily upon the door-handle, with the intention of pouncing suddenly upon his itinerant pupil. But the door would not open. Mr. Galloway turned, and turned, and shook the handle, like our respected friend Mr. Ketch did when he was locked in the cloisters, but he turned it to no purpose.

"He has not come yet!" wrathfully exclaimed Mr. Galloway. "All the work of the office on his shoulders and mine, the most busy time of the whole year, and here's half-past nine, and no appearance of him! If I live this day out, I'll complain to Lady Augusta!"

At this moment the housekeeper's little maid came running forward. "Where's Mr. Yorke?" thundered the proctor in his anger, as if the child had the keeping of him.

"Please, sir, he's gone to Port Natal."

"Gone to—what?" uttered Mr. Galloway.

She was unlocking the door, and then stood back to curtsy while Mr. Galloway entered, following in after him—an intelligent child for her years.

"Please, sir, Mr. Yorke came round this morning while me and missis was a-dusting of the place, and he said we was to tell Mr. Galloway, when he come, that he had gone to Port Natal, and left his compliments."

"It is not true!" cried Mr. Galloway. "How dare he play these tricks?" he added to himself.

"Please, sir, missis said she thought as it was true, 'cause he had got a carpet-bag," returned the young servant.

Mr. Galloway stared at the child. "You go round at once to Lady Augusta's," said he, "and ask what Mr. Yorke means by being so late. I desire that he will come immediately."

The child flew off, and Mr. Galloway, hardly knowing what to make of matters, proceeded to do what he ought to have found done. He and Jenkins had duplicate keys to the desks, letter-box, etc. Since Jenkins's illness his keys had been in the possession of Roland. Presently the child came back again.

"Please, sir, her ladyship's compliments, and Mr. Roland have gone to Port Natal."

The consternation that this would have caused Mr. Galloway, had he believed it, might have been pitiable.

An intimation that our clerk, who was in the office the previous night pursuing his legitimate work, has "gone to Port Natal," like we might say of somebody who goes to make a morning call at the next door, is not very credible. Neither did Mr. Galloway give credence to it.

"Did you see her ladyship?" he asked.

"Please, sir, I saw one of the servants, and she went to her ladyship, and brought out the message."

The young messenger retired, leaving Mr. Galloway to his fate. He persisted in assuming that the news was too absurd to be correct; but a dreadful inward misgiving began to steal over him.

The question was set at rest by the Lady Augusta. Feeling excessively vexed with Roland for not having informed Mr. Galloway of his intended departure—as from the message it would appear he had not done—she determined to go round; and did so, following closely on the heels of the maid. Her ladyship had already wonderfully recovered her spirits. They were of a mercurial nature, liable to go up and down at touch; and Hamish had contrived to cheer her greatly.

"What does all this mean? Where's Roland?" began Mr. Galloway, showing little more deference to her ladyship in his flurry than he might have shown to Roland himself.

"Did you not know he was going?" she asked.

"I know nothing. Where is he gone?"

"He has started for Port Natal—that is, he has started for London on his way to it. He went by the eight o'clock train."

Mr. Galloway sat down in consternation. "My lady, allow me to inquire what sort of behaviour you call this?"

"Whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, I can't help it," was the reply of Lady Augusta. "I'm sure *I* have enough to bear!" she added, melting into tears. "Of course he ought to have informed you of his intention, Mr. Galloway. I thought he did. He told me he had done so."

A reminiscence of Roland's communication crossed Mr. Galloway's mind—of his words, "Don't say I did not give you notice, sir." He had paid no heed to it then.

"He is just another of my headstrong boys," grumbled Lady Augusta. "They are all specimens of wilfulness.

I never knew that it was this morning he intended to be off until he was gone, and I had to run after him to the station. Ask Hamish Channing."

"He must be mad!" exclaimed Mr. Galloway.

"He says great fortunes are made out at Port Natal. I don't know whether it is so."

"Great fortunes made!" irascibly responded Mr. Galloway. "Pittances that folks go out with are lost when they are such as he. That's what it is. Harum-scarum chaps who won't work can do no good at Port Natal. Great fortunes made, indeed! I wonder that you can be led away by notions so wild and extravagant, Lady Augusta!"

"I am not led away by them," peevishly returned Lady Augusta, a recollection of her own elation on the point darting unpleasantly to her mind. "Where would have been the use of my holding out against it when he had got his heart upon the thing? He would have gone in spite of me. Do you *not* think fortunes are made there, Mr. Galloway?"

"I am sure they are not by such as Roland," was the reply. "A man who works one hour in the day and plays eleven would do less good at Port Natal than he would in his own country. A business man, thoroughly industrious and possessing some capital, may make something at Port Natal, as he would at any other port. In the course of years he might realize a fortune—in the course of *years*, I say, Lady Augusta."

This was not precisely the prospect Roland had pictured to Lady Augusta, or to which her own imagination had lent its hues, and she stood in commotion nearly equal to Mr. Galloway's. "What on earth will he do, then, when he gets there?" ejaculated she.

"Find out his mistake, my lady, and come home without a coat to his back, as hundreds have done before him, and worked their passage home to get here. It is to be hoped he will have to do the same. It will teach him what work is."

"There never was such an unhappy mother as I am!" bewailed my lady. "They *will* do just as they like, and always would, from George downwards; they won't listen to me. Poor dear boy! reduced, perhaps, to live on brown bread and peasoup!"

"And lucky to get that!" cried angry Mr. Galloway. "But the present question, Lady Augusta, is not what he may do when he gets to Port Natal, but what I am to do without him here. Look at the position it has placed me in!"

Lady Augusta could give neither help nor counsel. In good truth, it was not her fault. But she saw that Mr. Galloway seemed to think it was hers, or that it was partially hers. She departed home again, feeling cross with Roland, feeling damped about his expedition, and beginning to fancy that Port Natal might not, after all, bring her diamonds to wear, or offer her streets paved with malachite marble to drive upon.

Mr. Galloway sat down and reiterated the question in relation to himself which Lady Augusta had put regarding Roland when he should arrive at Port Natal—What on earth was he to do? He could not close his office; he could not perform its various duties himself; he could not be out of doors and in at one and the same time, unless, indeed, he cut himself in two! What *was* he to do?

It was more than Mr. Galloway could tell. He put his two hands upon his knees and stared in consternation, feeling himself grow hot and cold alternately. Could Roland—then whirling along in the train, reclining at his ease, his legs up on the opposite cushion as he enjoyed a luxurious pipe, to the inestimable future benefit of the carriage—have taken a view of Mr. Galloway and his discomfiture, his delight would have been unbounded.

"Incorrigible as he was, he was better than nobody," ejaculated Mr. Galloway, rubbing up his flaxen curls. "He could keep office, if he did not do much in it; he received and answered callers; he went out on hasty messages; and, upon a pinch, he did accomplish an hour or so's copying. I am down on my beam-ends and no mistake. What a simpleton the fellow must be! Port Natal, indeed, for him! If Lord Carrick were not own brother to my lady he might have the sense to stop it. Why, he——"

Arrival the first, and nobody to answer it but Mr. Galloway! A fly had driven up and stopped at the door. Nobody appeared to be getting out of it, so Mr. Galloway, perforce, proceeded to see what it wanted. It might contain one of the chapters, or the dean himself!

But by the time he reached the pavement the inmates were descending. A short lady, in a black bonnet and short black skirts, had let herself out on the opposite side, and had come round to assist somebody out on this. Was it a ghost, or was it a man? His cheeks were hollow and hectic, his eyes were glistening as with fever, his nostrils and his chest heaved in concert. He had got a fur boa wrapped round his neck, and his overcoat hung in plaits on his tall, attenuated form, which seemed too weak to support itself, or to get down the fly-steps without being lifted down.

"Now don't you be in a hurry!" the lady was saying in a cross tone. "You'll come pitch into the mud with your nose. Can't you wait? It's my belief you are wanting to do it. Here, let me get firm hold of you; you know you are as weak as ever was a rat!"

You may recognize the voice as belonging to Mrs. Jenkins, and that poor shadow could be nobody but Jenkins himself, for there certainly was not another like it in all Helstonleigh. Mr. Galloway stood in astonishment, wondering what this new move could mean. The descent accomplished, Jenkins was conducted by his wife through the passage to the office. He went straight to his old place at his desk, and sat down on his stool, his chest palpitating, his breath coming in great sighs—great heaving bursts. Laying his hat beside him, he turned respectfully to Mr. Galloway, who had followed him in, speaking with all his native humility,—

"I have come, sir, to do what I can for you in this emergency."

And there he stopped, coughing, panting, shaking, looking like a man more fit to be lying on his dying bed than to be keeping office. Mr. Galloway gazed at him with compassion. He said nothing. Jenkins at that moment could neither have heard nor answered, and Mrs. Jenkins was out paying the fly-driver.

The paroxysm was not over when she came in. She approached Jenkins, slightly shook him—her mode of easing the cough—dived in his pockets for his silk handkerchief, with which she wiped his brow, took off the fur from his neck, waited till he was quiet, and began,—

"I hope you are satisfied. If you are not, you ought to be. Who's to know whether you'll get back alive? *I* don't."

"What did he come for?" asked Mr. Galloway.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Jenkins, "that's just what I want to know. As if he could do any good in the state he is! Look at him, sir!"

Poor Jenkins, who was indeed a sight to be looked at, turned his wan face upon Mr. Galloway.

"I cannot do much, sir, I know; I wish I could. But I can sit in the office—at least, I hope I can—just to take care of it while you are out, sir, until you can find somebody to replace Mr. Roland."

"How did you know he was gone off?" demanded Mr. Galloway.

"It was in this way," interposed Mrs. Jenkins, ages before poor Jenkins could gather breath to answer. "I was on my hands and knees, brushing the fluff off my drawing-room carpet this morning, when I heard something tearing up the stairs at the rate of a coach-and-six. Who should it be but young Mr. Yorke on his way to Jenkins in bed, without saying so much as 'With your leave' or 'By your leave.' A minute or two and down he came again, gave me a little touch of his impudence, and was gone before I could answer. Well, sir, I kept on at my room, and when it was done I went downstairs to see about the breakfast, never suspecting what was going on with *him*," pointing her finger at Jenkins. "I was pouring out his tea when it was ready to take up to him, and putting a bit of something on a plate, which I intended to make him eat, when I heard something creeping down the stairs—stumbling, and panting, and coughing—and out I rushed. There stood he—*he*, Mr. Galloway!—dressed and washed as you see him now—he that has not got up lately till evening, and me dressing him then! 'Have you took leave of your senses?' said I to him. 'No,' said he, 'my dear, but I must go to the office to-day; I can't help myself. Young Mr. Yorke's gone away, and there'll be nobody.' 'And good luck go with him, for all the use he's of here, getting you out of your bed,' said I. If Jenkins were as strong as he'd used to be, Mr. Galloway, I should have felt tempted to treat him to a shaking; and then, perhaps, he'd have remembered it!"

"Mr. Roland told me he was going away, sir, and that you had nobody to replace him; indeed, I gathered that you were ignorant of the step," struck in the quiet, meek voice of poor Jenkins. "I *could* not stay away, sir, knowing the perplexity you would be put to."

"No, it's my belief he could not," tartly chimed in Jenkins's lady. "He would have tantalized himself into a fever. Why, Mr. Galloway, had I marched him back to his bed and turned the key upon him, he'd have been capable of letting himself down by a cord from his window, in the face and eyes of all the street, could he have found a pulley to tie it to.—Now, Jenkins, I'll have none of your contradiction! You know you would."

"My dear, I am not contradicting; I am not well enough to contradict," panted poor Jenkins.

"He would have come off there and then, all by himself, he would, Mr. Galloway, as I am a living sinner!" she hotly continued. "It's unbeknown how he'd have got here—holding on by the wall like a snail, or fastening himself on to the tail of a cart; but try at it in some way he would!—Be quiet, Jenkins! How dare you attempt to interrupt!"

Poor Jenkins had not thought to interrupt; he was only making a movement to pull off his greatcoat. Mrs. Jenkins resumed,—

"'No,' said I to him; 'if you must go, you shall be conveyed there, but you don't start without your breakfast.' So I sat him down in his chair, Mr. Galloway, and gave him his breakfast—such as it was. If there's one thing that Jenkins is obstinate in above all others, it's about eating. Then I sent Lydia for a fly, and wrapped up his throat in my boa—and that he wanted to fight against—and here he is."

"I wished to get here, sir, before you did," cried Jenkins meekly. "I knew the exertion would set me coughing at first, but if I had sat a while before you saw me, I should not have seemed so incapable. I shall be better presently, sir."

"What are you at with that coat?" tartly asked Mrs. Jenkins. "I declare your hands are never at rest. Your coat's not to come off, Jenkins. The office is colder than our parlour, and you'll keep it on."

Jenkins, humbly obeying, began to turn up the cuffs. "I can do a little writing, sir," he said to Mr. Galloway. "Is there anything that is in a hurry?"

"Jenkins," said Mr. Galloway, "I could not suffer you to write; I could not keep you here. Were I to allow you to stop in the state you are, just to serve me, I should lay a weight upon my conscience."

Mrs. Jenkins looked up in triumph. "You hear, Jenkins! What did I tell you? I said I'd let you have your way for once—'twas but the cost of the fly; but that if Mr. Galloway kept you here, once he set eyes on your poor creachy body, I'd eat him."

"Jenkins, my poor fellow," said Mr. Galloway gravely, "you must know that you are not in a state to exert yourself. I shall not forget your kindness; but you must go back at once. Why, the very draught from the frequent opening of the door would do you an injury; the exertion of speaking to answer callers would be too much for you."

"Didn't I tell you so, Jenkins, just in them very words?" interrupted the lady.

"I am aware that I am not strong, sir," acknowledged Jenkins to Mr. Galloway, with a deprecatory glance towards his wife to be allowed to speak. "But it is better I should be put to a trifle of inconvenience than that you should, sir. I can sit here, sir, while you are obliged to be out, or occupied in your private room. What could you do, sir, left entirely alone?"

"I don't know what I can do," returned Mr. Galloway, with an acerbity of tone equal to that displayed by Mrs. Jenkins, for the question recalled all the perplexity of his position. "Sacrifice yourself to me, Jenkins, you shall not. What absurd folly can have taken off Roland Yorke?" he added. "Do you know?"

"No, sir, I don't. When Mr. Roland came in this morning and said he was really off, you might have knocked me down with a feather. He would often get talking about Port Natal, but I never supposed it would come to anything. Mr. Roland was one given to talk."

"He had some tea at our house the other night, and was talking about it then," struck in Mrs. Jenkins. "He said he was worked to death."

"Worked to death!" satirically repeated Mr. Galloway.

"I'm afraid, sir, that through my unfortunate absence he has found the work heavier, and he grew dissatisfied," said Jenkins. "It has troubled me very much."

"You spoilt him, Jenkins; that's the fact," observed Mr. Galloway. "You did his work and your own. Idle young dog! He'll get a sickener at Port Natal."

"There's one thing to be thankful for, sir," said patient Jenkins—"that he has got his uncle, the earl, to fall back upon."

"Hark at him!" interrupted Mrs. Jenkins. "That's just like him! He'd be 'thankful' to hear that his worst enemy had an uncle to fall back upon. That's Jenkins all over. But now, what is to be the next movement?" she sharply demanded. "I must get back to my shop. Is he to come with me or to stop here—a spectacle for everybody that comes in?"

But at this moment, before the question could be decided—though you may rest assured Mrs. Jenkins would only allow it to be decided in her own way—hasty footsteps were heard in the passage, and the door was thrown open by Arthur Channing.

CHAPTER LII.

A RELIC FROM THE BURIAL-GROUND.

WHEN Hamish Channing joined the breakfast-table at home that morning at nine o'clock, he mentioned his adventure at the station with Lady Augusta Yorke. It was the first intimation they had received of Roland's departure—indeed, the first that some of them had heard of his intention to depart.

Arthur laid down his knife and fork. To him alone could the full consequences of the step occur, as regarded Mr. Galloway.

"Hamish, he cannot actually have gone?"

"That he is actually off by the train to London I can certify," was the reply of Hamish. "Whether he will be off to Port Natal is another thing. He desired me to tell you, Arthur, that he should write his adieu to you from town."

"He might have come to see me," observed Arthur, a shade of resentment in his tone. "I never thought he would really go."

"I did," said Hamish, "funds permitting him. If Lord Carrick will supply these, he'll be gone by the first comfortable ship, his mind was so entirely bent upon it."

"What can he think of doing at Port Natal?" inquired Constance wonderingly.

"Making his fortune." But Hamish laughed as he said it. "Wherever I may have met him latterly, his whole talk has been of Port Natal. Lady Augusta says he is going to take out frying-pans to begin with."

"Hamish!"

"She said so, Constance. I have no doubt Roland said so to her. I should like to see the sort of cargo he will lay in for the start."

"What does Mr. Galloway say to it, I wonder?" exclaimed Arthur, that gentleman's perplexities presenting themselves to his mind above anything else. "I cannot think what he will do."

"I have an idea Mr. Galloway is as yet unaware of it," said Hamish. "Roland assured me that no person whatever knew of his departure except Jenkins. He called upon him on his way to the station."

"Unaware of it!" Arthur fell into consternation great as Mr. Galloway's as he repeated the words. Was it possible that Roland had stolen a march on Mr. Galloway? He relapsed into silence and thought.

"What makes you so sad?" Constance asked of Arthur later, when they were dispersing to their several occupations.

"I am not sad, Constance, only thoughtful. I have been carrying on an inward battle," he added half laughingly.

"With your conscience?"

"With my spirit. It is a proud one yet, in spite of all I have had to tame it—a great deal more rebellious than I like it to be."

"Why, what is the matter, Arthur?"

"Constance, I think I ought to come forward and help Mr. Galloway out of this strait. I think my duty lies in doing it."

"To return to his office, you mean?"

"Yes; until he can see his way out of the wood. But it goes against the grain."

"Arthur, dear, I know you will do it," she gently said. "Were our duty always pleasant to us, where would be the merit in fulfilling it?"

"I shall do it," he answered. "To that I have made up my mind. The difficulty is, Constance, to do it with a good grace."

She looked at him with a loving smile. "Only try. A firm will, Arthur, will conquer even a rebellious spirit."

Arthur knew it. He knew how to set about it. And a little later he was on his way to Close Street, with the best grace in the world—not only to appearance, mind you, but inwardly. It is a GREAT thing, reader, to conquer the risings of a proud spirit—to bring it from its haughty, rebellious pedestal down to cordiality and love! Have you learnt the way?

Some parchments under his arm—for he had stayed to collect them together—Arthur bounded in to Mr. Galloway's. The first object his eyes fell on was that shadowy form, coughing and panting. "O Jenkins!" he involuntarily uttered, "what do you do out of your house?"

"Anxiety for me has brought him out," said Mr. Galloway. "How can I scold him?"

"I could not rest, sir, knowing my master was alone in his need," cried Jenkins to Arthur. "What is to become of the office, sir, with nobody in it?"

"But he is not alone," said Arthur; and if he had wanted a reward for coming forward, that moment would have supplied it in satisfying poor Jenkins. "If you will allow me, sir," Arthur added, turning frankly to Mr. Galloway, "I will take my place here until you shall be suited."

"Thank you," emphatically replied Mr. Galloway. "It will relieve me from a serious embarrassment."

Arthur went to his old desk, and sat down on his old stool, and began settling the papers and other things on it, just as if he had not been absent an hour. "I must still attend the cathedral as usual, sir," he observed to Mr. Galloway; "but I can give you up the whole of my other time. I shall be better for you than nobody."

"I would rather have you here than anybody else, Channing, he"—laying his hand on Jenkins's shoulder—"excepted. I offered for you to return before."

"I know you did, sir," replied Arthur in a brief tone—one that seemed to intimate he would prefer not to pursue the subject.

"And now are you satisfied?" struck in Mrs. Jenkins to her husband.

"I am more than satisfied," answered Jenkins, clasping together his hands. "With Mr. Arthur in the office, I shall have no fear of its missing me, and I can go home in peace to die."

"Please just to hold you tongue about dying," reprimanded Mrs Jenkins. "Your business is to get well if you can. And now I am going to see after a fly. A pretty dance I should have had here if he had persisted in stopping, bringing him messes and cordials every other half-hour! Which would have worn out first, I wonder—the pavement or my shoes?"

"Channing," said Mr. Galloway, "let us understand each other. Have you come here to do anything there may be to do, out of doors as well as in—in short, to be my clerk as heretofore?"

"Of course I have, sir, until"—Arthur spoke very distinctly—"until you shall be able to suit yourself—not longer."

"Then take this paper round to Deering's office, and get it signed. You will have time to do it before college."

Arthur's answer was to put on his hat and vault away with the paper. Jenkins turned to Mr. Galloway as soon as they were alone. "O sir, keep him in your office!" he earnestly said. "He will soon be of more value to you than I have ever been!"

"That he will not, Jenkins. Nor anybody else."

"Yes he will, sir! He will be able to replace you in the chapter-house upon any emergency, and I never could do that, you know, sir, not being a gentleman. When you have him to yourself alone, sir, you will see his value; and I shall not be missed. He is steady and thoughtful beyond his years, sir, and every day will make him older."

"You forget the charge against him, Jenkins. Until he shall be cleared of that—if he can be cleared of it—he will not be of great value to any one, certainly not to me."

"Sir," said Jenkins, raising his wan face, its hectic deepening and his eye lighting, while his voice sank to a whisper so deep as to savour of solemnity, "that time will come! He never did it, and he will as surely be cleared as that I am now saying it! Sir, I have thought much about this accusation; it has troubled me in sleep; but I know that God will bring the right to light for those who trust in Him. If anybody ever put their trust in God, it is Mr. Arthur Channing. I lie and think of all this, sir. I seem to be so near God now," Jenkins went on dreamily, "that I know the right must come to light—that it will come in God's own good time. And I believe I shall live to see it."

"You have certainly firm faith in his innocence, Jenkins. How, then, do you account for his very suspicious manner?"

"It does not weigh with me, sir. I could as soon believe a good wholesome apple-tree would bring forth poisonous berries, as that Mr. Arthur would be guilty of a deliberately bad action. Sometimes I have thought, sir, when puzzling over it, that he may be screening another. There's no telling how it was. I hear, sir, that the money has been returned to you."

"Yes. Was it he who told you?"

"It was Mr. Roland Yorke who told me, sir. Mr. Roland is another, sir, who has had firm faith in his innocence from the first."

"Much his faith goes for!" ejaculated Mr. Galloway, as he came back from his private room with a letter, which he handed to Jenkins, who was skilled in caligraphy. "What do you make of it?" he asked. "It is the letter which came with the returned money."

"It is a disguised hand, sir; there's no doubt of that," replied Jenkins, when he had surveyed it critically. "I do not remember to have seen any person write like it."

Mr. Galloway took it back to his room, and presently a fly drove up with Mrs. Jenkins inside it. Jenkins stood at the office door, his hat in his hand, and his face turned upon the room. Mrs. Jenkins came up and seized his arm, to marshal him to the fly.

"I was but taking a farewell of things, sir," he observed to Mr. Galloway. "I shall never see the old spot again."

Arthur arrived just as Jenkins was got in. He put his hand over the door. "Make yourself easy, Jenkins; it will all go on smoothly here Good-bye, old fellow. I'll come and see you very soon."

"How he breaks, does he not, sir?" exclaimed Arthur to Mr. Galloway.

"Ay; he's not long for this world."

The fly proceeded on its way, Mrs. Jenkins, with her snappish manner, though really not unkind heart, lecturing Jenkins on his various shortcomings until it drew up at their own door. As Jenkins was being set down from it, one of the college boys passed at a great speed; a railroad was nothing to it. It was Stephen Bywater. Something, legitimate or illegitimate, had detained him, and now the college bell was going.

He caught sight of Jenkins, and hurried as he was, much of punishment as he was bargaining for, it had such an effect upon him that he pulled up short. Was it a man or a shadow? Was it Jenkins or his ghost? Bywater had never been so struck with any sight before.

The most appropriate way in which it occurred to him he could give vent to his surprise was to prop his back against the shop door-post and indulge in a soft, prolonged whistle.

He could not take his eyes from Jenkins's face. "Is it you or your shadow, Jenkins?" he asked, making room for the invalid to pass.

"It's myself, sir, thank you. I hope you are well, sir."

"Oh, I'm always jolly," replied Bywater, and then he began to whistle again.

He followed Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins into the shop with his eyes—that is, they followed Jenkins. Bywater had heard, as a matter of necessity, of Jenkins's illness, and had given as much thought to it as he would have done if told Jenkins had the headache; but to fancy him like *this* had never occurred to Bywater.

Now, somewhere beneath Bywater's waistcoat there really was a little bit of heart; and as he thus looked, a great fear began to thump against it. He followed Jenkins into the parlour. Mrs. Jenkins, after divesting Jenkins of his coat and her boa, planted him right before the fire in his easy-chair, with a pillow to his back, and was now whisking down into the kitchen, regardless of certain customers waiting in the shop to be served.

Bywater, unasked, sat himself down in a chair near to poor Jenkins and his panting breath, and indulged in another long stare. "I say, Jenkins," said he, "what's the matter with you?"

Jenkins took the question literally. "I believe it may be called a sort of decline, sir. I don't know any other name for it."

"Shan't you get well?"

"Oh no, sir. I don't look for that now."

The fear thumped at Bywater's heart worse than before. A past vision of locking up old Ketch in the cloisters, through which pastime Jenkins had come to a certain fall, was uncomfortably present to Bywater just then. He had been the ringleader.

"What brought it on?" asked he.

"Well, sir, I suppose it was to come," meekly replied Jenkins. "I have had a bad cough, spring and autumn, for a long while now, Master Bywater. My brother went off just the same, sir, and so did my mother."

Bywater pushed his honest, red face forward, but it was not looking quite so impudent as usual. "Jenkins," said he, plunging headlong into the fear, "DID—THAT—FALL—DO—IT?"

"Fall, sir! What fall?"

"That fall down from the organ-loft. Because that was my fault. I had the most to do with locking up the cloisters that night."

"Oh, bless you, sir, no! Never think that, Master Bywater," lowering his voice till it was as grave as Bywater's. "That fall did me good—good, sir, instead of harm."

"How do you make out that?" asked Bywater, drawing his breath a little easier.

"Because, sir, in the few days' quiet that I had in bed my thoughts seemed in an unaccountable manner to be drawn to thinking of heaven. I can't rightly describe, sir, how or why it could have been I remember his lordship the bishop talked to me a little bit in his pleasant, affable way about the necessity of always being prepared; and my wife's Bible lay on the drawers by my bed's head, and I used to pick up that. But I don't think it was either of those causes much. I believe, sir, that it was God Himself working in my heart. I believe He sent the fall in His good mercy. After I got up I seemed to know that I should soon go to Him; and—I hope it is not wrong to say it—I seemed to wish to go."

Bywater was somewhat puzzled. "I am not speaking about your heart and religion and all that, Jenkins. I want to know if the fall helped to bring on this illness?"

"No, sir; it had nothing to do with it. The fall hurt my head a little—nothing more; and I got well from it directly. This illness, which has been taking me off, must have been born with me."

"Hoo——" Bywater's shout, as he tossed up his trencher, was broken in upon by Mrs. Jenkins. She had been beating up an egg with sugar and wine, and now brought it in a tumbler.

"My dear," said Jenkins, "I don't feel to want it."

"Not want it!" said Mrs. Jenkins resolutely. And in two seconds she had laid hold of him, and it was down his throat. "I can't stop parleying here all day, with my shop alive with customers." Bywater laughed, and she retreated.

"If I could eat gold, sir, she'd get it for me," said Jenkins; "but my appetite fails. She's a good wife, Master Bywater."

"Stunning," acquiesced Bywater. "I wouldn't mind a wife myself if she'd feed me up with eggs and wine."

"But for her care, sir, I should not have lasted so long. She has had great experience with the sick."

Bywater did not answer. Rising to go, his eyes had fixed themselves upon some object on the mantelpiece as pertinaciously as they had previously been fixed upon Jenkins's face. "I say, Jenkins, where did you get this?" he exclaimed.

"That, sir? Oh, I remember. My old father brought it in yesterday. He had cut his hand with it. Where now did he say he found it? In the college burial-yard, I think, Master Bywater."

It was part of a small broken phial of a peculiar shape, which had once apparently contained ink—an elegant shape, it may be said, not unlike a vase. Bywater began turning it about in his fingers; he was literally feasting his eyes upon it.

"Do you want to keep it, Jenkins?"

"Not at all, sir. I wonder my wife did not throw it away before this."

"I'll take it, then," said Bywater, slipping it into his pocket. "And now I'm off. Hope you'll get better, Jenkins."

"Thank you, sir. Let me put the broken bottle in paper, Master Bywater. You will cut your fingers if you carry it loose in your pocket."

"Oh, that be bothered!" answered Bywater. "Who cares for cut fingers?"

He pushed himself through Mrs. Jenkins's shop of customers with as little ceremony as Roland Yorke might have used, and went flying towards the cathedral. The bell ceased as he entered. The organ pealed forth, and the dean and chapter, preceded by some of the bedesmen, were entering from the opposite door. Bywater ensconced himself behind a pillar until they should have traversed the body, crossed the nave, and were safe in the choir. Then he came out and made his way to old Jenkins the bedesman.

The old man, in his black gown, stood near the bell ropes, for he had been one of the ringers that day. Bywater noticed that he had got his left hand partially tied up in a handkerchief.

"Halloa, old Jenkins!" said he, *sotto voce*, "what have you done with your hand?"

"I gave it a nasty cut yesterday, sir, just in the ball of the thumb. I wrapped my handkerchief round it just now for fear of opening it again while I was ringing the bell. See," said he, taking off the handkerchief and showing the place to Bywater.

"What an old muff you must be to cut yourself like that!"

"But I didn't do it for the purpose," returned the old man. "We was ordered into the burial-ground to put it a bit to rights, and I fell down with my hand on a broken phial. I ain't as active as I was. I say, though, sir, do you know that service has begun?"

"Let it begin," returned careless Bywater. "This was the bottle you fell over, was it not? I found it on Joe's mantelpiece just now."

"Ay, that was it. It must have laid there some time—a good three months, I know."

Bywater nodded his head. He returned the bottle to his pocket and went to the vestry to get his surplice. Then he slid into college under the severe eyes of the Reverend Mr. Pye, which were bent upon him from the chanting-desk, and ascended his stall just in time to take his part in the *Venite, exultemus Domino*.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RETURN HOME.

It almost seemed, to the grateful heart of Mr. Channing, as if the weather had prolonged its genial fineness on purpose for him. A more charming autumn had never been known at Borcette, and up to the very hour of Mr. Channing's departure there were no signs of winter. Taking it as a whole, it had been the same at Helstonleigh. Two or three occasional wet days, two or three cold and windy ones; but they soon passed over, and people said to each other how this fine weather would shorten the winter.

Never did November turn out a more lovely day than the one that was to witness Mr. Channing's return. The sun shone brightly: the blue sky was without a cloud. All Nature seemed to have put on a smiling face to hail him a welcome. And yet—to what was he returning?

For once in his life Hamish Channing shrank from meeting his father and mother. How should he break the news to them? They were arriving full of joy, of thankfulness at the restoration of health to Mr. Channing; how could Hamish mar it with the news regarding Charles? Told it must be, and he must be the one to do it. In good truth, Hamish was staggered at the task. His own hopeful belief that Charley would some day "turn up" was beginning to die out, for every hour that dragged by without bringing him certainly gave less and less chance of it. And even if Hamish had retained hope himself, it was not likely he could impart it to Mr. and Mrs. Channing.

"I shall get leave from school this afternoon," Tom suddenly exclaimed that morning at breakfast.

"For what purpose?" inquired Hamish.

"To go up to the station and meet them."

"No, Tom. You must not go to the station."

"Who says so?" sharply cried Tom.

"I do," replied Hamish.

"I dare say! That's good!" returned Tom, speaking in his hasty spirit. "You know you are going yourself, Hamish, and yet you would like to deprive me of the same pleasure. Why, I'd not miss being there for anything! Don't say, Hamish, that you are never selfish."

Hamish turned upon him with a smile, but his tone changed to sadness. "I wish with all my heart, Tom, that you, or somebody else, could go and meet them instead of myself, and undertake what I shall have to do. I can tell you I never had a task imposed upon me that I found so uncongenial as the one I must go through this day."

Tom's voice dropped a little of its fierce shade. "But, Hamish, there's no reason why I should not meet them at the station. That will not make it the better or the worse for you."

"I will tell you why I think you should not," replied Hamish—"why it will be better that you should not. It is most desirable that they should be home here in this house before the tidings are broken to them. I should not like them to hear of it in the streets or at the station, especially my mother."

"Of course not," assented Tom.

"And were you at the station," quietly went on Hamish to him, "the first question would be, 'Where's Charley?' If Tom Channing can get leave of absence from school, Charley can."

"I could say——"

"Well?" said Hamish, for Tom had stopped.

"I don't know what I could say," acknowledged Tom.

"Nor I. My boy, I have thought it over, and the conclusion I come to, if you appear at the station, is this: either that the tidings must be told to them then and there, or else an evasion bordering upon an untruth. If they do not see you there, they will not inquire particularly after Charles; they will suppose you are both in school."

"I declare I never set my mind upon a thing but some hindrance starts in to frustrate it!" cried Tom in vexation. But he relinquished his intention from that moment.

Chattering Annabel threw up her head. "As soon as papa and mamma come home we shall put on mourning, shall we not? Constance was talking about it with Lady Augusta."

"Do not talk of mourning, child," returned Hamish. "*I* can't give him up, if you do."

Afternoon came, and Hamish proceeded alone to the station. Tom, listening to the inward voice of reason, was in school, and Arthur was occupied in the cathedral, the expected time of their arrival being towards the close of afternoon service. Hamish had boasted that he should *walk* his father through Helstonleigh for the benefit of beholders, if he happily came home capable of walking; but, like poor Tom and *his* plan, that had to be relinquished. In the first half-dozen paces they would meet half a dozen gossipers, and the first remark from each, after congratulations, would be, "What a sad thing this is about your little Charles!" Hamish lived in doubt whether it might not, by some untoward luck, come out at the station in spite of his precaution in keeping away Tom.

But so far all went well. The train came in to its time, and Hamish, his face lighted with excitement, saw his father, once more in possession of his strength, descending without assistance from the carriage, walking alone on the platform — not in the full strength and power of yore: that might never be again. He stooped slightly and moved slowly, as if his limbs were yet stiff, limping a little. But that he was now in a good sound state of health was evident; his face betrayed it. Hamish did not know whose hands to clasp first—his or his mother's.

"Can you believe that it is myself, Hamish?" asked Mr. Channing, when the first few words of thankful greeting had passed.

"I should hide my head for ever as a false prophet if it could be anybody else," was the reply of Hamish. "You know I always said you would so return. I am only in doubt whether it is my mother."

"What is the matter with me, Hamish?" asked Mrs. Channing.

"Because you would make about two of the thin, pale, careworn Mrs. Channing that went away," cried he, turning his mother round to regard her, deep love shining out from his gay blue eyes. "I hope you have not taken to rouge your cheeks, ma'am, but I am bound to confess they look uncommonly like it."

Mrs. Channing laughed merrily. "It has done me untold good, Hamish, as well as papa; it seems to have set me up for years to come. The seeing him grow better day by day would have effected it without any other change."

Mr. Channing had actually gone himself to see after the luggage. How strange it seemed! Hamish caught him up. "If you can give yourself trouble now, sir, there's no reason that you should do so while you have your great lazy son at your elbow."

"Hamish, boy, I am proud of doing it."

It was soon collected. Hamish hastily, if not carelessly, told a porter to look to it, took Mr. Channing's arm, and marched him to the fly which Mrs. Channing had already found. Hamish was in lively dread of some officious friend or other coming up who might drop a hint of the state of affairs."

"Shall I help you in, father?"

"I can help myself now, Hamish. I remember you promised me that I should have no fly on my return. You have thought better of it."

"Yes, sir, wishing to get you home before bedtime; which might not be the case if you were to show yourself in the town and stop for all the interruptions."

Mr. Channing stepped into the fly. Hamish followed him, first giving the driver a nod. "The luggage! the luggage!" exclaimed Mrs. Channing as they moved off.

"The porter will bring it, mother. He would have been a month putting it on the fly."

How could they suppose anything was the matter? Not a suspicion of it ever crossed them. Never had Hamish appeared more light-hearted—in fact, in his self-consciousness, Hamish a little overdid it. Let him get them home before the worst came!

"We find you all well, I conclude!" said Mrs. Channing. "None of them came up with you! Arthur is in college, I suppose, and Tom and Charles are in school?"

"It was Arthur's hour for college," remarked Hamish, conveniently ignoring the rest of the sentence. "But he ought to be out now. Arthur is at Galloway's again," he added. "He did not write you word, I believe, as you were so shortly expected home."

Mr. Channing turned his glance on his son like lightning. "Cleared, Hamish?"

"In my opinion, yes. In the opinion of others, I fear not much more than he previously was."

"And himself?" asked Mr. Channing. "What does he say now?"

"He does not speak of it to me."

Hamish put his head out at the window as he spoke, nodding to somebody who was passing. A question of Mr. Channing's called it in again.

"Why has he gone back to Galloway's?"

Hamish laughed. "Roland Yorke took an impromptu departure one fine morning for Port Natal, leaving the office and Mr. Galloway to do the best they could with each other. Arthur buried his grievances, and offered himself to Mr. Galloway in the emergency. I am not quite sure that I should have been so forgiving."

"Hamish, he has nothing to forgive Mr. Galloway. It is on the other side."

"I am uncharitable, I suppose," remarked Hamish. "I cannot like Mr. Galloway's treatment of Arthur."

"But what is it you say about Roland Yorke and Port Natal?" interposed Mrs. Channing. "I do not understand."

"Roland is really gone, mother. He has been in London these ten days, and it is expected that every post will bring news that he has sailed. Roland has picked up a notion somewhere that Port Natal is an enchanted land, converting poor men into rich ones; and he is going to try what it will do for him, Lord Carrick fitting him out. Poor Jenkins is sinking fast."

"Changes! changes!" remarked Mr. Channing. "Go away but for two or three months, and you must find them on return—some gone, some dying, some——"

"Some restored who were looked upon as incurable," interrupted Hamish. "My dear father, I will not have you dwell on dark things the very moment of your arrival; the time for that will come soon enough."

Judy nearly betrayed all, and Constance's aspect might have betrayed it had the travellers been suspicious. She (Constance) came forward in the hall, white and trembling. When Mrs. Channing shook hands with Judy she put an unfortunate question, "Have you taken good care of your boy?" Judy knew it could only allude to Charles, and for an answer she set up a noise, between a cry and a sob, that might have been heard in the far-off college schoolroom. Hamish took Judy by the shoulders, bidding her go out and see whether any rattletraps were left in the fly, and so turned it off.

They were all together in the sitting-room—Mr. and Mrs. Channing, Hamish, Constance, Arthur, and Annabel—united, happy, as friends are and must be when meeting after a separation, talking of this, talking of that, imparting notes of what had occurred on either side. Hamish showed himself as busy as the rest; but Hamish felt all the while upon a bed of thorns, for the hands of the timepiece were veering on for five, and he must get the communication over before Tom came in. At length Mrs. Channing went up to her room, accompanied by Constance. Annabel followed. And now came Hamish's opportunity. Arthur had gone back to Mr. Galloway's, and he was alone with his father. He plunged into it at once; indeed, there was no time for delay.

"Father," he exclaimed, with deep feeling, his careless manner changing as by magic, "I have very grievous news to impart to you. I would not enter upon it before my mother, though she must be told of it also, and at once."

Mr. Channing was surprised, more surprised than alarmed. He never remembered to have seen Hamish betray so much emotion. A thought crossed his mind that Arthur's guilt might have been brought clearly to light.

"Not that," said Hamish. "It concerns—— Father, I do not like to enter upon it. I shrink from my task. It is very bad news indeed."

"You, my children, are all well," cried Mr. Channing hastily, speaking the words as a fact, not as a question. "What other news 'very bad' can be in store?"

"You have not seen us all," was the answer of Hamish.

And Mr. Channing, alarmed then, looked inquiringly at him.

"It concerns Charles. An—an accident has happened to him."

Mr. Channing sat down and shaded his eyes. He was a moment or two before he spoke. "One word, Hamish: is he dead?"

Hamish stood before his father and laid his hand affectionately upon his shoulder. "Father, I *wish* I could have prepared you better for it!" he exclaimed, with emotion. "We do not know whether he is dead or alive."

Then he explained—explained more in summary than in detail, touching lightly upon the worst features of the case, enlarging upon his own hopeful view of it. Bad enough it was at the best, and Mr. Channing found it so. *He* could feel no hope. In the shock of grief he turned almost with resentment upon Hamish.

"My son, I did not expect this treatment from you."

"I have taken enough blame to myself. I know he was left in my charge," sadly replied Hamish; "but, indeed, I do not see how I could have helped it. Although I was in the room when he ran out of it, I was buried in my own thoughts and never observed his going. I had no suspicion anything was astir that night with the college boys Father, I would have saved his life with my own."

"I am not blaming you for the fact, Hamish; blame is not due to you. Had I been at home myself, present, I might no more have stopped his going out than you did. But you ought to have acquainted me instantly. A whole month, and I to be left in ignorance!."

"We did it for the best. Father, I assure you that not a stone has been left unturned to find him, alive or—or dead. You could not have done more had you hastened home; and it has been so much suspense and grief spared to you."

Mr. Channing relapsed into silence. Hamish glanced uneasily to that ever-advancing clock. Presently he spoke.

"My mother must be told before Tom comes home. It will be better that you take the task upon yourself, father. Shall I send her in?"

Mr. Channing looked at Hamish as if he scarcely understood the import of the words. From Hamish he looked to the clock. "Ay; go and send her."

Hamish went to his mother's room and returned with her.

But he did not enter. He merely opened the door and shut her in. Constance, with a face more scared than ever, came and stood in the hall. Annabel stood there. Judy, wringing her hands, and sending off short ejaculations of lament in an undertone, came to join them, and Sarah stood peeping out of the kitchen door. They remained gazing at the parlour door, dreading the effect of the communication that was going on inside.

"If it had been that great big Tom it wouldn't matter so much," wailed Judith in a tone of resentment. "The missis would know that *he'd* be safe to turn up some time or other, a strong fellow like him!"

A sharp cry within the room! The door was flung open, and Mrs. Channing came forth, her face pale, her eyes wild, her hands lifted. "It cannot be true! It cannot be! Hamish! Judith! Where is he?"

Hamish folded her hands in his and gently drew her in again. They all followed. No reason why they should not, now that the communication was made. Almost at the same moment Mr. Huntley arrived.

Of course the first thought that had occurred to the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Channing was that had *they* been at home to direct affairs in the search Charley would have been found. It is the thought that would occur to us all: we never give other people credit for doing as much as we should have done. "This might have been tried, and the other might have been tried." It makes little difference when told that they *have* been tried, for then we fall back upon some other suggestion. Mrs. Channing reproached Hamish with keeping it from them.

"My dear lady, you must blame me, not him," interposed Mr. Huntley. "Left to himself, Hamish would have started Arthur off to you post-haste. It was I who suggested the desirability of keeping you in ignorance; it was I who brought Hamish to see it. And I know that, when the brunt of your grief shall have passed, you will acknowledge that it was the best, the wisest, and the kindest course."

"But there are so many things that we could have suggested that perhaps none but a father or mother would think of!" urged Mrs. Channing, lifting her yearning face. They wished they could see her weep.

"You could have suggested nothing that has not been done," returned Mr. Huntley. "Believe me, dear Mrs.

Channing! We have had many good suggestors, many good counsellors. Butterby has had the conducting of the search."

Mr. Channing turned to them. He was standing at the far window. "I should like to see Butterby."

"He will be here in an hour's time," said Hamish. "I knew you would wish to see him, and I requested him to come."

"The worst feature of the whole," put in Judith, with as much acrimony as ever was displayed by Mr. Ketch, "is that them boys should not have got their deserts. They have not as much as had a birching; and I say that the college masters ought to be hooted. I'd 'ghost' 'em!"

"The punishment lies in abeyance for the present," explained Hamish. "A different punishment from any the headmaster could inflict will be required, should—should——" Hamish stopped. He did not like to say, in the presence of his mother, "should the body be found." "Some of them are suffering pretty well as it is," he continued after a brief pause. "Master Bill Simms lay in bed for a week with fright, and was obliged to have Mr. Hurst to him. Report goes that Mr. Hurst soundly flogged his son, by way of a commencement, for his share."

A pushing open of the outer door, a bang, and hasty footsteps in the hall! Tom had arrived—Tom, with his sparkling eyes, his glowing face. They sparkled for his father only in that first moment—his father, who turned and *walked* to meet him.

"O papa! What baths those must be!" cried honest Tom. "If ever I get rich, I'll go over there and make them a present of a thousand pounds. To think that nothing else should have cured you!"

"I think something else must have had a hand in curing me, Tom."

Tom looked up inquiringly. "Ah, papa, you mean God."

"Yes, my boy. God has cured me. The baths were but instruments in His hands."

CHAPTER LIV.

"THE SHIP'S DROWNED."

REJECTING all offers of refreshment—the welcome-home meal which Constance had planned and Judith prepared, both with so much loving care—Mr. Channing resolved to seek out Butterby at once. In his state of suspense he could neither wait, nor eat, nor remain still; it would be a satisfaction only to see Butterby and hear his opinion.

Mr. Huntley accompanied him, scarcely less proud than Hamish would have been to walk once more arm in arm with Mr. Channing. But as there is not the least necessity for our going to the police-station, for Mr. Butterby could tell us no more than we already know, we will just pay a short visit to Master Stephen Bywater.

That gentleman stood in the cloisters, into which he had seduced old Jenkins the bedesman, having waited for the dusk hour, that he might make sure nobody else would be there. Ever since the last day you saw old Jenkins in the cathedral he had been laid up in the house with a touch of what he called his "rheumatiz." Decrepit old fellows were all the bedesmen, monopolizing enough "rheumatiz" between them for half the city. If one was not laid up, another would be, especially in winter. However, old Jenkins had come out again to-day, to the gratification of Master Bywater, who had been wanting him. The cloisters were all but dark, and Mr. Ketch must undoubtedly be most agreeably engaged or he would have shut up before.

"Now, then, old Jenkins," Bywater was saying, "you show me the exact spot, and I'll give you sixpence for smoke."

Old Jenkins hobbled to one of the mullioned windows near to the college entrance, and looked over into the dim graveyard. "'Twere about four or six yards off here," said he.

"But I want to know the precise spot," returned Bywater. "Get over and show me!"

The words made old Jenkins laugh. "Law, sir, me get over there! You might as well ask me to get over the college. How be I to do it?"

"I'll hoist you up," said Bywater.

"No, no," answered the man. "My old bones be past hoisting now. I shouldn't never get back alive, once I were propelled over into that there graveyard."

Bywater felt considerably discomfited. "What a weak rat you must be, old Jenkins! Why, it's nothing!"

"I know it ain't—for you college gents. 'Twouldn't have been much for me when I were your age. Skin nor clothes warn't of much account to me then."

"Oh, it's that, is it?" returned Bywater contemptuously. "Look here, old Jenkins; if your things come to the wars, I'll get my uncle to look you out some of his old ones. I'll give you sixpence for baccy, I say!"

The old bedesman shook his head. "If you give me a waggin load of baccy, I couldn't try at getting over there. You might just as good put a babby in arms on the ground and tell it to walk!"

"Here, get out of the way for an old muff!" was Bywater's rejoinder, and in a second he had mounted the window-frame and dropped into the burial-ground. "Now, then, old Jenkins, I'll go about, and you call out when I come to the right spot."

By these means Bywater arrived at a solution of the question whereabouts the broken phial was found, old Jenkins pointing out the spot to the best of his ability. Bywater then vaulted back again, and alighted safe and sound in the cloisters. Old Jenkins asked for his sixpence.

"Why, you did not earn it!" said Bywater. "You wouldn't get over!"

"A sixpence is always useful to me," said the old man; "and some of you gents has 'em in plenty. I ain't paid much; and Joe, he don't give me much. 'Tain't him: he'd give away his head, and always would; it's her. Precious close she is with the money, though she earns a sight of it, I know, at that shop of her'n, and keeps Joe like a king. Wine and all the rest of it she have got for him since he was ill. 'There's a knife and fork for ye whenever ye like to come,' she says to me in her tart way. But deuce a bit of money will she give. If it weren't for one and another friend a-giving me a odd sixpence now and then, Master Bywater, I should never hardly get no baccy!"

"There, don't bother!" said Bywater, dropping the coin into his hand.

"Why, bless my heart, who's this a-prowling in the cloisters at this hour ?" exclaimed a well-known, cracked voice, advancing upon them simultaneously with shuffling footsteps. "What do you do here, pray ?"

"You would like to know, wouldn't you, Mr. Calcraft ?" said Bywater. "Studying architecture. There !"

Old Ketch gave a yell of impotent rage, and Bywater decamped, as fast as his legs would carry him, through the west door.

Arrived at his home, or rather his uncle's, where he lived—for Bywater's paternal home was in a far-off place over the sea—he went straight up to his own room, where he struck a match and lighted a candle. Then he unlocked a sort of bureau, and took from it the phial found by old Jenkins and a smaller piece which exactly fitted into the part broken. He had fitted them in ten times before, but it appeared to afford him satisfaction, and he now sat down and fitted them again.

"Yes," soliloquized he as he nursed one of his legs—his favourite attitude—"it's as sure as eggs. And I'd have had it out before if that old helpless muff of a Jenkins had been forthcoming. I knew it was safe to be somewhere near the college gates, but it was as well to ask."

He turned the phial over and over between his eye and the candle, and resumed,—

"And now I'll give Master Ger a last chance. I told him the other day that if he'd only speak up like a man to me, and say it was an accident, I'd drop it for good. But he won't. And find it out I will. I have said I would from the first, just for my own satisfaction ; and if I break my word, may they tar and feather me ! Ger will only have himself to thank ; if he won't satisfy me in private, I'll bring it against him in public. I suspected Master Ger before—not but what I suspected another ; but since Charley Channing—— Oh, bother, though ! I don't want to get thinking of *him !*"

Bywater locked up his treasures, and descended to his tea. That over, he had enough lessons to occupy him for a few hours and keep him out of mischief.

Meanwhile Mr. Channing's interview with the renowned Mr. Butterby had brought forth nothing, and he was walking back home with Mr. Huntley. Mr. Huntley strove to lead his friend's thoughts into a different channel ; it seemed quite a mockery to endeavour to whisper hope for Charley.

"You will resume your own place in Guild Street at once?" he observed.

"To-morrow, please God."

They walked a few steps farther in silence, and then Mr. Channing entered upon the very subject which Mr. Huntley was hoping he would not enter upon. "I remember you spoke at Borcette of having something in view for Hamish, should I be able to attend to business again. What is it?"

"I did," said Mr. Huntley; "and I am sorry that I did. I spoke prematurely."

"I suppose it is gone?"

"Well—no; it is not gone," replied Mr. Huntley, who was above equivocation. "I do not think Hamish would suit for the place."

Mr. Channing felt a little surprised. There were few places that Hamish might not suit for if he chose to put out his talents. "You thought he would suit then?" he remarked.

"But circumstances have since induced me to alter my opinion," said Mr. Huntley. "My friend," he more warmly added to Mr. Channing, "you will oblige me by allowing the subject to drop. I candidly confess to you that I am not so pleased with Hamish as I once was, and I would rather not interfere in placing him."

"How has he offended you? What has he done?"

"Nay, that is all I will say. I could not help giving you a hint to account for what you might have deemed caprice. Hamish has not pleased me, and I cannot take him by the hand. There let it rest."

Mr. Channing was content to let it rest. In his inmost heart he entertained no doubt that the cause of offence was in some way connected with Mr. Huntley's daughter. Hamish was poor, Ellen would be rich; therefore it was but natural that Mr. Huntley should consider him an ineligible *parti* for her. Mr. Channing did not quite see what that had to do with the present question, but he could not, in delicacy, urge it further.

They found quite a levee when they got in—the Reverend Mr. Pye, Mr. Galloway (who had called in with Arthur upon leaving the office for the night), and William Yorke. All were anxious to welcome and congratulate Mr. Channing, and all were willing to tender a word of sympathy touching Charles. Possibly Mr. Yorke had also another motive; if so, we shall come to it in due time.

Mr. Pye stayed but a few minutes. He did not say a word about the seniorship, neither did Mr. Channing to him. What, indeed, could either of them say? The subject was unpleasant to both sides, therefore it was best avoided. Tom, however, thought differently.

"Papa," he exclaimed, plunging into it the moment Mr. Pye's back was turned, "you might have taken the opportunity to tell him that I shall leave the school. It is not often he comes here."

"But you are not going to leave the school," said Mr. Channing.

"Yes I am," replied Tom, speaking with unmistakable firmness. "Hamish made me stay on until you came home, and I don't know how I have done it. It is of no use, papa! I cannot put up with the treatment—the insults. It was bad enough to lose the seniorship, but that is as nothing to the other. And to what end should I stop in when my chance of the exhibition is gone?"

"It is not gone, Tom. Mr. Huntley—as word was written to me at Borcette—has declined it for his son."

"It is not the less gone for me, papa. Let me merit it as I will, I shall not be allowed to receive it any more than I did the seniorship. I am out of favour, both with master and boys; and you know what that means, relative to a public school. If you witnessed the way I am served by the boys you would be the first to say I must leave."

"What do they do?" asked Mr. Channing.

"They do enough to provoke my life out of me," said Tom, falling into a little of his favourite heat. "Were it myself only that they attacked, I don't know but I might stop and brave it out; but it is not. They go on against Arthur in a way that would make a saint mad."

"Pooh, pooh!" interposed Mr. Galloway, who was standing by. "If I am content to accept the innocence of Arthur, surely the college school may be."

Mr. Channing turned to the proctor. "Do you now believe him innocent?"

"I say I am content to accept his innocence," was the reply of Mr. Galloway; and Arthur, who was within hearing, could only do as he had had to do so many times before—school his spirit to patience. "Content to accept" and open exculpation were things essentially different.

"Let me speak with you a minute, Galloway," said

Mr. Channing, taking the proctor's arm and leading him across the hall to the drawing-room. "Tom," he added, looking back, "you shall tell me of these grievances another time."

The drawing-room door closed upon them, and Mr. Channing spoke with eagerness. "Is it possible that you still suspect Arthur to have been guilty?"

"Channing, I am fairly puzzled," returned Mr. Galloway. "His own manner relating to it has not changed, and that manner is not compatible with innocence. You made the same remark yourself at the time."

"But you have had the money returned to you, I understand."

"I know I have."

"Well, that surely is a proof that the thief could not have been Arthur."

"Pardon me," replied Mr. Galloway. "It may be a proof as much against him as for him; it may have come from himself."

"Nay. Where was Arthur to get twenty pounds to send to you?"

"There are two ways in which he might get it. But"—Mr. Galloway broke off abruptly—"I do not like to urge these things on you; they can only inflict pain."

"Not greater pain than I have already undergone," was Mr. Channing's answer. "Tell me, I pray you, all your thoughts, all you suspect, just as though you were speaking to any indifferent friend. It is right that I should know it.—Yes, come in, Huntley," Mr. Channing added, for Mr. Huntley at that moment opened the door, unconscious that any private conference was going forward. "I have no secrets from you. Come in. We are talking of Arthur."

"I was observing that there are two means by which the money could have come from Arthur," resumed Mr. Galloway, when Mr. Huntley had entered: "the one by his never having used the note originally taken; the other, by getting a friend to return it for him. Now my opinion is that he did not pursue the first plan. I believe that if he took the note, he used it. I questioned him on the evening of its arrival, and at the first moment his manner almost convinced me that he was innocent. He appeared to be genuinely surprised at the return of the money, and ingenuously confessed that he had not possessed any to send. But his manner veered again—suddenly, strangely veered round to all its old unsatisfactory suspiciousness; and when I hinted that I should recall Butterby to my counsels, he became agitated, as he had done formerly. My firm belief," Mr. Galloway added, laying his hand impressively upon Mr. Channing—"my firm belief is, that Arthur did get the money sent back to me through a friend."

"But what friend would be likely to do such a thing for him?" debated Mr. Channing, not in the least falling in with the argument. "I know of none."

"I think"—and Mr. Galloway dropped his voice—"that it came from Hamish."

"From Hamish!" was Mr. Channing's echo in a strong accent of dissent. "That is nonsense. Hamish would not lend himself to screen guilt. Hamish has not twenty pounds to spare."

"He might spare it in the cause of a brother; and for a brother's sake he might even screen guilt," pursued Mr. Galloway. "Honourable and open as Hamish is, I must still express my belief that the twenty pounds came from him."

"Honourable and open as Hamish is!" The words grated on the ear of Mr. Huntley, and a cynical expression rose to his face. Mr. Channing observed it. "What do you think of it?" he involuntarily asked.

"I have never had any other opinion but that the money did come from Hamish," dryly remarked Mr. Huntley. And Mr. Channing, in his utter astonishment, could not answer.

"Hamish happened to call in at my office the afternoon that the money was received," resumed Mr. Galloway. "It was after I had spoken to Arthur. I had been thinking it over, and came to the conclusion that if it had come from Arthur, Hamish must have done it for him. In the impulse of the moment I put the question to him—Had he done it to screen Arthur? And Hamish's answer was a mocking one."

"A mocking one!" repeated Mr. Channing.

"A light, mocking, careless answer—one that vexed me, I know, at the time. The next day I told Arthur point-blank that I believed the money came from Hamish. I wish you could have seen his flush of confusion; and deny it he did not. Altogether, my impression against Arthur was rather confirmed than the contrary by the receipt of the money, though I am truly grieved to have to say it."

"And *you* think the same!" Mr. Channing exclaimed to Mr. Huntley.

"Never mind what I think," was the answer. "Beyond the one opinion I expressed, I will not be drawn into the discussion. I did not intend to say so much; it was a slip of the tongue."

Mr. Huntley was about to leave the room as he spoke, perhaps lest he might make other "slips;" but Mr. Channing interposed and drew him back. "Stay, Huntley," he said; "we cannot rest in this uncertainty. Oblige me by remaining one instant while I call Hamish."

Hamish entered in obedience. He appeared somewhat surprised to see them assembled in conclave, looking so solemn, but he supposed it related to Charles. Mr. Channing undeceived him.

"Hamish, we are speaking of Arthur. Both these gentlemen have expressed a belief——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Mr. Huntley. "I said that I should be obliged if you would leave me out of the discussion."

"What does it signify?" returned Mr. Channing, his tone one of haste. "Hamish, Mr. Galloway has expressed to me a belief that you have so far taken part with Arthur in that unhappy affair as to send back the money to him."

"Oh, indeed!" said Hamish, and his manner was precisely what Mr. Galloway had described it to have been at the time—light, mocking, careless. "Mr. Galloway did me the honour to express something of the same belief, I remember."

"Did you send it, Hamish?" asked his father, a severe look crossing his face.

"No, sir, I did not," emphatically replied Hamish. And Mr. Huntley turned and bent his keen eye upon him. In his heart of hearts he believed it to be a deliberate falsehood.

"I did not send the money, and I do not know who did send it," went on Hamish. "But as we are upon the subject, perhaps I may be allowed to express my opinion that if there were as much labour taken to establish Arthur's innocence as it seems to me there is to prove him guilty, he might have been cleared long ago."

That the remark was aimed at Mr. Galloway there was nc doubt. Mr. Huntley answered it; and had they been suspicious, they might have detected a covert meaning in his tone.

"You, at any rate, must hold firm faith in his innocence."

"Firm and entire faith," distinctly assented Hamish. "Father," he added, impulsively turning to Mr. Channing, "put all notion of Arthur's guilt from you at once and for ever. I would answer for him with my life."

"Then he must be screening some one," cried Mr. Galloway. "It is one thing or the other. Hamish, it strikes me you know. Who is it?"

A red flush mounted to the brow of Hamish, but he lapsed into his former mocking tone. "Nay," said he, "I can tell nothing of that."

He quitted the room as he spoke, and the conference broke up. It appeared that no satisfactory solution could be come to did they keep it on till midnight. Mr. Galloway took leave and hastened home to dinner

"I must be going also," remarked Mr. Huntley; but, nevertheless, he returned with Mr Channing to the other room.

"You told me at Borcette that you were fully persuaded of Arthur's innocence; you were ready to ridicule me for casting a doubt upon it," Mr. Channing remarked to him in a low tone as they crossed the hall.

"I have never been otherwise than persuaded of it," said Mr. Huntley. "He is as innocent as you or as I."

"And yet you join Mr. Galloway in assuming that he and Hamish sent back the money! The one assertion is incompatible with the other."

Mr. Huntley laid his hand upon Mr. Channing's shoulder. "My dear friend, all that you and I can do is to let the matter rest. We should only plunge into shoals and quicksands and lose our way in them were we to pursue it."

They had halted at the parlour door to speak. Judith came bustling up at that moment from the kitchen, a letter in her hand, and looking as if in her hurry she might have knocked them over, had they not made way for her to enter.

"Bad luck to my memory, then! It's getting not worth a button. Here, Master Arthur. The postman gave it me at the door just as I had caught sight of the fly turning the corner with the master and missis. I slipped it into my pocket, and never thought of it till this minute."

"So it has come at last, has it?" cried Arthur, recognizing the handwriting of Roland Yorke.

"Is he really off?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, he is really off," replied Arthur, opening the letter and beginning to glance over the contents. "He has sailed in the ship *Africa*. Don't talk to me, Tom. What a long letter!"

They left him to read it in peace. Talking together—Mr. and Mrs. Channing, Mr. Huntley, William Yorke, Hamish, Constance—all were in a group round the fire, paying no attention to him, no attention until an exclamation caused them to turn—an exclamation half of distress, half of fear. Arthur had risen from his chair and stood the picture of excitement, his face and lips blanching.

"What is the matter?" they exclaimed.

"Roland — the ship — Roland!" And there Arthur stopped, apparently unable to say more.

"Oh, it's drowned, it's drowned!" cried quick Annabel. "The ship's drowned, and Roland with it!" And Arthur sank back in his chair again and covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER LV.

NEWS FROM ROLAND.

You will like to look over Arthur's shoulder as he reads the letter just received from Roland Yorke.

"Dear old Chum,—By the time you get this letter I shall be ploughing the waves of the briny deep in the ship *Africa*. You will get this letter on Wednesdry night—that is, you ought to get it—for I have desired Carrick to post it accordingly, and I'm sure he'll do it if he does not forget. And old Galloway will get a letter at the same time, and Lady Augusta will get one. *I* shall have been off more than twenty-four hours previously, for we leave Gravesend on Tuesday at noon. Carrick has behaved like a trump. He has bought me all the things I asked him, and paid my passage money, and given me fifty pounds in my pocket to land with, so I am safe to get on. The only thing he stood out about was the frying-pans. He couldn't see of what use they'd be, he said. So we made a compromise, and I am taking out only four-and-twenty instead of the forty dozen that I had thought of. I could not find Bagshaw's list, and the frying-pans are about all I am taking in the shape of utensils, except a large tool-chest, which they palmed upon Carrick, for it was as dear as fire's hot.

"I dare say you have been vowing vengeance upon me for not coming round to see you before I started; but I stopped away on purpose, for I might have let out something that I did not care to let out then, and that's what I am writing for.

"Old fellow, I have been fit to kill myself. All that bother that they laid upon you about the bank-note ought to have fallen upon me, for it was I who took it. There! the confession's made. And now explode at me for ten minutes with all your energy and wrath before you read on. It will be a relief to your feelings and to mine. Perhaps if you'd go out of the way to swear a bit it mightn't be amiss."

It was at this juncture that Arthur had started up so wildly, causing Annabel to premise that the "ship was drowned." In his shock of bewilderment the first shadowy thought that overpowered him was a dreadful feeling of grief for Roland's sake. He had liked Roland; with all his faults he had liked him much; and it was as if some cherished statue had fallen and been dashed to pieces. Wild, joyful beatings of relief that Hamish was innocent were mingling with it, thumping against his heart, soon to exclude all else and fill it to bursting. But as yet this was indistinct, and the first clear idea that came to him was—Was Roland telling truth? or was he only playing a joke upon him? Arthur read on,—

"I was awfully hard up for money. I was worse than Hamish, and he was pretty hard up then; though he seems to have staved off the fellows since—he best knows how. I told him one day I should like to borrow the receipt, and he laughed, and said he'd give it me with all the pleasure in life if it were transferable. Ask him if he remembers saying it. When Galloway was sending the money that day to the cousin Galloway, I thought what a shame it was as I watched him slip the bank-note inside the letter. That cousin Galloway was always having money sent him, and I wished Galloway would give it me instead. Then came that row with Mad Nance; and as you and Galloway turned to see what was up, I just pulled open the envelope, that instant wet and stuck down, twitched out the money, pressed the gum down again, and came and stood at your back at the window, leaning out. It did not take me half a minute to do; and the money was in my pocket, and the letter was empty! But now, look here! I never meant to steal the note. I am not a Newgate thief yet. I was in an uncommon fix just then over a certain affair, and if I could not stop the fellow's mouth, there'd have been the dickens to pay. So I took the money for *that* stop-gap, never intending to do otherwise than replace it in Galloway's desk as soon as I could get it. I knew I should be having some from Lord Carrick. It was all Lady Augusta's fault. She had turned crusty and would not help me. I stopped out all that afternoon with Knivett, if you remember, and that put me out of the suspicion when the stir came; though it was not for that reason I stayed, for I never had a thought that the row would fall upon us in the office. I supposed the loss would be set down to the post-office—as, of course, it ought to have been. I stayed out, the bank-note burning a hole all the while in my waistcoat pocket, and sundry qualms coming over me whether I should not put it back again. I began to wonder how I could get rid of it safely, not knowing but Galloway might have the number; and I think I should have put it back, what with that doubt and my twitches of consience, but for a thing that happened. After I parted with Knivett I ran home to get something I wanted, and Lady Augusta heard me and called me into her bedroom. 'Roland,' said she, 'I want you to get me a twenty-pound note from the bank; I have occasion to send one to Ireland.' Now, Arthur, I ask you, was there ever such an impetus given to a fellow in his wrong-doing? Of course my note (that is, Galloway's note) went to Ireland, and a good joyful riddance it seemed—as thoroughly *gone* as if I had dispatched it by telegraph to the North Pole. Lady Augusta handed me twenty sovereigns, and I made believe to go to the bank and exchange them for a note. She put it into her letter, and I took it to the post-office at once. No wonder you grumbled at my being away so long!

"Next came the row. And when I found that suspicion fell upon *you*, I was nearly mad. If I had not parted with the money, I should have gone straight to Galloway and said, 'Here it is; I took it.' Not a soul stood up for you as they ought! Even Mr. Channing fell into the suspicion, and Hamish seemed indifferent and cool as a cucumber. I have never liked Galloway since; and I long to this day to give Butterby a ducking. How I kept my tongue from blurting out the truth I don't know; but a gentleman born does not like to own himself a thief. It was the publicity given to it that kept me silent; and I hope old Galloway and Butterby will have horrid dreams for a week to come, now they know the truth! I was boiling over always. I don't know how I managed to live through it, and that soft calf of a Jenkins was always defending Galloway when I flew out about him. Nobody could do more than I did to throw the blame upon the post-office—and it was the most likely thing in the world for the post-office to do—but the more I talked, the more old Galloway brought up his rubbish about his 'seals.' I hope he'll have horrid dreams for a month to come! I'd have prosecuted the post-office if I had had the cash to do it with, and that might have turned him.

"Well, old chap, it went on and on—you lying under the cloud, and I mad with everybody. I could do nothing to clear you (unless I had confessed), except sending back the money to Galloway's, with a letter to say you did not do it. It was upon my mind night and day. I was always planning how to accomplish it, but for some time I could not get the money. When Carrick came to Helstonleigh he was short himself, and I had to wait. I told him I was in an awful mess for the want of twenty pounds. And that was true in more senses than one, for I did not know where to turn for money for my own uses. At last Carrick gave it me—he had given me a dab or two before, of five pounds or so, of no use—and then I had to wait an opportunity of getting it to London to be posted. Carrick's departure afforded that. I wrote the note to Galloway with my *left* hand in printing letters, put the money inside it, and Carrick promised to post it in London. I told him it was a *valentine* to old Galloway, flattering him on his youthful curls, and Carrick laughed till he was hoarse at the notion. Deuce take his memory! he had been pretty near a week in London before he thought of the letter, and then he put his hand into his pocket and found it. I had given it up by that time, and thought nobody in the world ever had such luck as I got. At last it came; and all I can say is, I wish the post-office had taken that before it ever did come. Of all the crying shames, that was the worst. The old carp got the money, and *yet* would not clear you! I shall never forgive Galloway for that; and when I come back from Port Natal, rolling in wealth, I'll not look at him when I pass him in the street, which will cork him uncommonly, and I don't care if you tell him so. Had I wavered about Port Natal before, that would have decided me. Clear you I would, and I saw there was no way to do it but by telling the truth, which I did not care to do while I was in Helstonleigh. And now I am off, and you know the truth; and Galloway knows it, for he'll have his letter when you have yours (and I hope it will be a pill for him); and all Helstonleigh will know it, and you are cleared, dear old Arthur!

"The first person that I shall lavish a little of my wealth upon when I return will be poor Jenkins, if he should be still in the land of the living. We all know that he has got as much in him as a gander, and lets that adorable Mrs. J. (I wish you could have seen her turban the morning I took leave!) be mistress and master; but he has done me many a good turn; and what's more, he *stood up for you.* When Galloway, Butterby, and Co. were on at it, discussing proofs against you, Jenkins's humble voice would be heard—'I am sure, gentlemen, Mr. Arthur never did it!' Many a time I could have hugged him, and he shall get some of my good luck when I reach home. You shall get it, too, Arthur. I shall never make a friend to care half as much for as I care for you, and I wish you would have been persuaded to come out with me and make your fortune; but as you would not, you shall share mine. Mind, I should have cleared you just the same if you had come.

"And that's all I have to tell. And now you see why I did not care to say 'Good-bye,' for I don't think I should have said it without telling all. Remember me to the folks at your house; and I hope Mr. Channing will come home stunning. I shall look to you for all the news, mind! If a great wind blows the cathedral down, or a fire burns the town up, it's you that must write it; nobody else will. Direct to me, 'Post-office, Port Natal,' until I send you an address, which I shall do the first thing. Have you any news of Charley?

"I had almost forgotten that bright kinsman of mine, the chaplain of Hazeldon. Pray present my affectionate compliments to him, and say he has not the least idea how very much I revere him. I should like to see his face when he finds it was I who was the delinquent. Constance can turn the tables on him now. But if she ever forgives him, she'll deserve to be as henpecked as Jenkins is; and tell her I say so.

"I meant to have told you about a spree I have had since I came to London, but there's no room, so I'll conclude sentimentally, as a lady does.

"Yours for ever and ever,
"ROLAND YORKE."

You must not think that Arthur Channing read this letter deliberately, as you have been able to read it. He had but skimmed it—skimmed it with straining eye and burning brow—taking in its general sense, its various points, but of its words none. In his overpowering emotion, his perplexed confusion, he started up with wild words: "O father, he is innocent!—Constance, he is innocent!—Hamish, Hamish! forgive—forgive me! I have been wicked enough to believe you guilty all this while."

To say that they stared at him, to say that they did not understand him, would be poor words to express the surprise that fell upon them and seemed to strike them dumb. Arthur kept on reiterating the words, as if he could not sufficiently relieve his over-burdened heart.

"Hamish never did it! Constance, we might have known it! Constance, what could so have blinded our reason? He has been innocent all this while."

Mr. Huntley was the first to find his tongue. "Innocent of what?" asked he. "What news have you received there?" pointing to the letter.

"It is from Roland Yorke. He says"—Arthur hesitated, and lowered his voice—"that bank-note lost by Mr. Galloway——"

"Well?" they uttered, pressing round him.

"It was Roland that took it!"

Then arose a babel of voices—questions to Arthur, references to the letter, and explanations. Mr. Channing, amidst his deep thankfulness, gathered Arthur to him with a fond gesture. "My boy, there has been continual conflict waging in my heart," he said—"appearances *versus* my better judgment. But for your own doubtful manner, I should have spurned the thought that you were guilty. Why did you not speak out boldly?"

"Father, how could I, believing that it was Hamish?—Hamish, dear Hamish, say you forgive me!"

Hamish was the only one who had retained calmness. Remarkably cool he was. He gazed upon them with the most imperturbable self-possession—rather inclined to be amused than otherwise. "Suspect me!" cried he, raising his eyebrows.

"We did, indeed!"

"*Bien obligé*," responded Mr. Hamish.—"Perhaps *you* shared the honour of the doubt?" he mockingly added, turning to Mr. Huntley.

"I did," replied that gentleman. "Ellen did not," he added, losing his seriousness in a half laugh. "Miss Ellen and I have been at daggers drawn upon the point."

Hamish actually blushed like a schoolgirl. "Ellen knows me better," was all he said, speaking very quietly. "I should have thought some of the rest of you had known me better also."

"Hamish," said Mr. Huntley, "I think we were all in for a host of blunders."

Mr. Channing had listened in surprise, Mrs. Channing in indignation. Her brave, good Hamish! her best and dearest!

"I cannot see how it was possible to suspect Hamish," observed Mr. Channing.

But before any more could be said, they were interrupted by Mr. Galloway, an open letter in his hand. "Here's a pretty dinner for a man!" he exclaimed. "I go home, expecting to get a meal in peace, and I find this pill upon my plate!"

They understood, naturally, what the pill was, especially Arthur, who had been told by Roland himself that he was writing to Mr. Galloway. "You see, sir," said Arthur, with a bright smile, "that I was innocent."

"I do see it," replied Mr. Galloway, laying his hand on Arthur's shoulder. "Why could you not speak openly to my face and tell me so?"

"Because—— I am ashamed, sir, now to confess why. We were all at cross-purposes together, it seems."

"He suspected that it was all in the family, Mr. Galloway," cried Hamish, in his gay good-humour. "It appears that he laid the charge of that little affair to *me*."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Galloway.

"We both did," exclaimed Constance, coming forward with streaming eyes. "Do you think that the mere fact of the suspicion being cast upon him, all public though it was made, could have rendered us so cowardly miserable as it did?—Hamish, how shall we atone to you?"

"The question is, How shall I atone to you, my old friend, for the wrong done your son?" exclaimed Mr. Galloway, seizing Mr. Channing's hand.—"Arthur, you and I shall have accounts to make up together."

"If reparation for unjust suspicion is to be the order of the day, I think I ought to get some of it," said laughing Hamish, with a glance at Mr. Huntley.

A sudden thought seemed to strike Mr. Channing. "Huntley," he impulsively cried, "was this the cause of displeasure that you hinted had been given you by Hamish?"

"That, and nothing else," was Mr. Huntley's answer. "I suppose I must take him into favour again—'make reparation,' as he says."

A very saucy smile crossed the lips of Hamish. It as good as said, "I know who will, if you don't." But Mr. Galloway was interrupting.

"The most extraordinary thing of the whole is," he observed, with unwonted emphasis, "that we never suspected Roland Yorke, knowing him as we did know him. It will be a caution to me as long as I live never to go again by appearances. Careless, thoughtless, impulsive, conscienceless Roland Yorke! Of course! Who else would have been likely to help themselves to it? I wonder what scales were before our eyes!"

Mr. Channing turned to his son Tom, who had been seated astride on the arm of a sofa, in a glow of astonishment, now succeeded by satisfaction. "Tom, my boy, there'll be no particular hurry to leave the college school, will there?"

Tom slid off his perch and went straight up to Arthur. "Arthur, I beg your pardon heartily for the harsh words and thoughts I may have given you. I was just a fool, or I should have known you could not be guilty. Were you screening Roland Yorke?"

"No," said Arthur. "I never suspected him for a moment. As to anybody's begging *my* pardon, I have most cause to do that for suspecting Hamish. You'll be all right, Tom, now."

But now, in the midst of this demonstration from all sides, I'll leave you to judge what were the feelings of that reverend divine, William Yorke. You may remember that he was present. He had gone to Mr. Channing's house ostensibly to welcome Mr. Channing home, and congratulate him on his restoration. Glad, in truth, was he to possess the opportunity to do that. But Mr. Yorke's visit also included a purpose less disinterested. Repulsed by Constance in the two or three appeals he had made to her, he had impatiently awaited the return of Mr. Channing to solicit his influence. Remembering the past, listening to this explanation of the present, you may imagine, if you can, what his sensations must have been. He who had held up his head in his haughty Yorke spirit, ready to trample on Arthur for the suspicion of guilt cast upon him, ready to believe that he *was* guilty, resenting it upon Constance, had now to stand and learn that the guilt lay in his family, not in theirs. No wonder he stood silent, grave, his lips drawn in to sternness, his tongue still.

Mr. Galloway soon departed again. He had left his dinner getting cold upon his table. Mr. Huntley took the occasion to leave with him, and in the earnestness of discussion they all went out with them to the hall save Constance. This was Mr. Yorke's opportunity. His arms folded, his pale cheek flushed to pain, he moved before her, and stood there, drawn to his full height, speaking hoarsely.

"Constance, will it be possible for you to forgive me?"

What a fine field it presented for her to play the heroine—to go into fierce declamations that she never could and never would forgive him, but would hold herself aloof from him for ever and a day, condemning him to bachelorhood! Unfortunately for the embellishment of these pages, Constance Channing had nothing of the heroine in her composition. She was only one of those simple, truthful, natural English girls, whom I hope you often meet in your everyday life. She smiled at William Yorke through her glistening eyelashes, and drew closer to him—almost touched him. Did he take the hint? He took *her*—took her on to that manly breast that would henceforth be her shelter for ever.

"Heaven knows how I will strive to atone to you, my darling!"

It was a happy evening, chequered though it necessarily was with thoughts of Charles. And Mr. Channing, in the midst of his deep grief and perplexity, thanked God for His wonderful mercy in restoring the aspersed to freedom. "My boy," he exclaimed to Arthur, "how bravely you have borne!"

"Not always very bravely," said Arthur, shaking his head. "There were times when I was inwardly rebellious."

"It could not have been done without one thing," resumed Mr. Channing—"firm trust in God."

Arthur's cheek kindled. That had ever been present with him. "When things would wear their darkest aspect, I used to say to myself, 'Patience and hope, and trust in God!' But I never anticipated this bright ending," he added. "I never thought that I and Hamish should both be cleared."

"I cannot conceive how you could have suspected Hamish," Mr. Channing repeated after a pause. Of all the wonders, that fact seemed to have taken most hold of his mind.

Arthur made a slight answer, but he did not pursue the topic. There were circumstances connected with it regarding Hamish not yet explained. He could not speak of them to Mr. Channing.

Neither were they to be explained, as it seemed, to Arthur—at any rate, not yet awhile. When they retired to rest, Hamish came into his room, like he had done that former night months ago, when the suspicion had just fastened upon Arthur. They went upstairs together, and Hamish, instead of turning to his own room, followed Arthur to his. He set down the candle on the table, and turned to Arthur with his frank smile.

"How is it that we can have been playing at these cross-purposes, Arthur? Why did you not tell me at the time that you were innocent?"

"I think I did tell you so, Hamish, if my memory serves me right."

"Well, I am not sure; it may have been so, but in a very undemonstrative sort of manner, if you did at all. That sort of manner from you, Arthur, would only create perplexity."

Arthur smiled. "Don't you see. Believing that you had taken it, I thought you must know whether I was innocent or guilty. And for your sake I did not dare strenuously to defend myself to others. Had but a breath of suspicion fallen upon you, Hamish, it might have cost my father his place."

"What induced you to suspect me? Surely not the simple fact of being alone for a few minutes with the letter in Galloway's office?"

"Not that. That alone would have been nothing; but coupled with other circumstances, it assumed a weight. Hamish, I will tell you. Do you remember the trouble you were in at the time, owing money in the town?"

A smile parted Hamish's lips. He looked half inclined to make fun of the reminiscence. "I remember it well enough. What of that?"

"You contrived to pay those debts, or partially to pay them, at the precise time the note was taken; and we knew you had no money of your own to do it. We saw you also with gold in your purse—through Annabel's tricks, do you remember?—and we knew that it could not be yours—legitimately yours, I mean."

Hamish's smile turned into a laugh. "Stop a bit, Arthur. The money with which I paid up and the gold you saw *was* mine—legitimately mine. Don't speak so fast, old fellow."

"But where did it come from, Hamish?"

"It did not come from Galloway's office, and it did not drop from the skies," laughed Hamish. "Never mind where else it came from. Arthur, boy, I wish you had been candid, and had given me a hint of the suspicion."

"We were at cross-purposes, as you observe," repeated Arthur. "Once plunge into such, and there's no knowing when the enlightenment will come—perhaps never. But you were not very open with me."

"I was puzzled," replied Hamish. "You may remember that seeing a crowd round the Guildhall was the first intimation I received of the matter. When they told me, in answer to my questions, that my brother, Arthur Channing, was taken up on suspicion of stealing the bank-note, and was then under examination, I should have laughed in their faces but for my inclination to knock them down. I went into that hall, Arthur, trusting in your innocence as implicitly as I trusted in my own, boiling over with indignation against all who had dared to accuse you, ready to stand up for you against the world. I turned my eyes upon you as you stood there, and your gaze met mine. Arthur, what made you look so? I never saw guilt—or perhaps I would rather say shame, conscious shame—shine out more palpably from any countenance than it did from yours then. It startled me—it *cowed* me; and in that moment I did believe you guilty. Why did you look so?"

"I looked so for your sake, Hamish. Your countenance betrayed your dismay, and I took it for signs of your own guilt and shame. Not until then did I fully believe you guilty. We were at cross-purposes, you see, throughout the piece."

"Cross-purposes, indeed!" repeated Hamish.

"Have you believed me guilty up to now?"

"No," replied Hamish. "After a few days my infatuation wore off. It was an infatuation, and nothing less, ever to have believed a Channing guilty. I then took up another notion, and that I have continued to entertain."

"What was it?"

"That you were screening Roland Yorke."

Arthur lifted up his eyes to Hamish.

"I did. Roland's excessive championship of you, his impetuous agitation when others brought it up against you, first aroused my suspicions that he himself must have been guilty; and I came to the conclusion that you also had penetrated his guilt, and were generously screening him in a tacit manner. I believed that you would not let a stir be made in it to clear you lest it should bring it home to him. Cross-purposes again, you will say."

"Ah, yes. Not so much as the idea of suspecting Roland Yorke ever came across me. All my fear was lest he or any should suspect you."

Hamish laughed as he placed his hands upon Arthur's shoulders. "The best plan for the future will be to have no secrets one from the other, otherwise it seems hard to say what labyrinth we may not get into. What do you say, old fellow?"

"You began the secrets first, Hamish."

"Did I? Well, let us thank Heaven that the worst are over."

Ay, thank Heaven! Most sincerely was Arthur Channing doing that. The time to give thanks had come.

Meanwhile Mr. Huntley had proceeded home. He found Miss Huntley in the stiffest and most uncompromising of moods; and no wonder, for Mr. Huntley had kept the dinner waiting, I am afraid to say how long. Harry, who was to have dined with them that day, had eaten his, and flown off to the town again to keep some appointment with the college boys. Miss Huntley now ate hers in dignified displeasure; but Mr. Huntley, opposite to her, appeared to be in one of his very happiest moods. Ellen attributed it to the fact of Mr. Channing's having returned home well. She asked a hundred questions about them—of their journey, their arrival—and Mr. Huntley never seemed tired of answering.

Barely was the cloth removed when Miss Huntley rose. Mr. Huntley crossed the room to open the door for her and bow her out. Although he was her brother, she would never have forgiven him had he omitted that little mark of ceremony. Ellen was dutifully following. She could not always brave her aunt. Mr. Huntley, however, gave Ellen a twitch as she was passing him, drew her back, and closed the door upon his sister.

"Ellen, I have been obliged to take Mr. Hamish into favour again."

Ellen's cheeks turned into a glow. She tried to find an answer, but none came, and it ended in a stammer.

"I find Hamish had nothing to do with the loss of the bank-note."

Then she found her tongue. "O papa, no! How could you ever have imagined such a thing? You might have known the Channings better. They are above suspicion."

"I did know them better at one time, or else you may be sure, young lady, Mr. Hamish would not have been allowed to come here as he did. However, it is cleared up, and I suppose you would like to tell me that I was just a donkey for my pains."

Ellen shook her head and laughed. She would have liked to ask whether Mr. Hamish was to be allowed to come again on the old familiar footing had she known how to frame the question. But it was quite beyond her courage.

"When I told him this evening that I had suspected him——"

She clasped her hands, she turned to Mr. Huntley, her rich colour going and coming. "Papa, you *told* him?"

"Ay. And I was not the only one to suspect him or to tell him. I can assure you that, Miss Ellen."

"What did he say? How did he receive it?"

"Told us he was much obliged to us all. I don't think Hamish *could* be put out of temper."

"Then do you not dislike him now, papa?" she said timidly.

"I never have disliked him. When I believed what I did of him, I could not dislike him, try as I would. There, you may go to your aunt now."

And Ellen went, feeling that the earth and air around her had suddenly grown into a terrestrial Eden.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BROKEN PHIAL.

THAT broken phial which you have heard of was burning a hole in Bywater's pocket, like Roland Yorke said the bank-note did in his. He had been indecisive about complaining to the master—strangely so for Bywater. The fact was, he had had a strong suspicion from the very first that the boy who did the damage to the surplice was Pierce senior—at least his suspicions had been divided between that gentleman and Gerald Yorke. The cause of suspicion against Pierce need not be entered into, since it was misplaced; in point of fact, Master Pierce was, so far as that feat went, both innocent and unconscious. But Bywater could not make sure that he was, and he did not care to bring the accusation against Gerald publicly, should he be innocent.

You saw Bywater, a chapter or two back, fitting the broken pieces together in his bedroom. On the following morning—which was likewise the morning following the arrival of the important letter from Roland Yorke—Bywater detained Gerald Yorke when the boys tore down the schoolroom steps after early school.

"I say, Yorke, I said I'd give you a last chance, and now I am doing it," he began. "If you'll acknowledge the truth to me about that surplice affair, I'll let it drop. I will, upon my honour. I'll never say another word"

Gerald flew into a rage. "Now look you here, Master Bywater," was his angry retort; "you bother me again with that stale fish, and I'll put you up for punishment. It's——"

Gerald stopped. Tom Channing was passing close to them, and Master Gerald had never cared to be heard when talking about the surplice. At that moment a group of boys who were running out of the cloisters the opposite road to Tom Channing turned round and hissed him, Tod

Yorke adding some complimentary remark about "stolen notes." As usual, it was a shaft launched at Arthur. Not as usual did Tom receive it. There was nothing of defiant fierceness now in his demeanour, nothing of half-subdued rage. Tom halted, took off his trencher with a smile of suavity that might have adorned Hamish, and thanked them with as much courtesy as if it had been real, especially Tod. Gerald Yorke and Bywater looked on with surprise. They little dreamt of the great and good secret that Tom now carried within him. He could afford to be calm.

"Why, it's four months good since that surplice was damaged," resumed Gerald in a tone of irritation to Bywater as soon as they were alone. "One would think it was of rare value by your keeping up the ball in this way. Every now and then you break out afresh about that surplice. Was it made of gold?"

"It was made of Irish linen," returned Bywater, who generally contrived to retain his coolness whoever might get heated. "I tell you that I have got a fresh clue, Yorke—one I have been waiting for. I thought it would turn up some time. If you say you did it, by accident or how you like, I'll let it drop. If you don't, I'll bring it before Pye after breakfast."

"Bring it," retorted Gerald.

"Mind you, I mean what I say. I shall bring the charge against you, and I have got the proofs."

"Bring it, I say," fiercely repeated Gerald. "Who cares for your bringings? Mind your bones afterwards, that's all."

He pushed Bywater from him with a haughty gesture and raced home to breakfast, hoping there'd be something good to abate his hunger.

But Bywater was not to be pushed from his determination—never a boy in the school less likely than he. He went home to *his* breakfast, and returned to school to have his name inscribed on the roll, and then went into college with the other nine choristers, and took his part in the service. And the bottle, I say, was burning a hole in his pocket. The Reverend William Yorke was chanting, and Arthur Channing sat at the organ. Would the Very Reverend the Dean of Helstonleigh, standing in his stall so serenely placid, his cap resting on the cushion beside him, ever again intimate a doubt that Arthur was not worthy to take part in the service? But the dean did not know the news yet.

Back in the schoolroom, Bywater lost no time. He presented himself before the master, and entered upon his complaint, schoolboy fashion.

"Please, sir, I think I have found out who inked my surplice."

The master had allowed the occurrence to slip partially from his memory; at any rate, it was some time since he had called it up. "Oh, indeed!" said he somewhat cynically to Bywater, after a pause given to revolving the circumstances. "Think you have found out the boy, do you?"

"Yes, sir; I am pretty sure of it. I think it was Gerald Yorke."

"Gerald Yorke! One of the seniors!" repeated the master, casting a penetrating gaze upon Bywater.

The fact was, Mr. Pye at the time of the occurrence had been somewhat inclined to a secret belief that the real culprit was Bywater himself. Knowing that gentleman's propensity to mischief, knowing that the destruction of a few surplices more or less would be only fun to him, he had felt an unpleasant doubt upon the point. "Did you do it yourself?" he now plainly asked of Bywater.

Bywater for once was genuinely surprised. "I had no more to do with it, sir, than this desk had," touching the master's. "I should not have spent many an hour since trying to ferret it out if I had done it."

"Well, what have you found out?"

"On the day it happened, sir, when we were discussing it in the cloisters, little Channing suddenly started up with a word that caused me to think he had seen something connected with it in which Gerald Yorke was mixed up. But the boy recollected himself before he had said much, and I could get no more from him. Once afterwards I heard him tell Yorke that he had kept counsel about the inked surplice."

"Is that all?" asked the master, while the whole school sat with tingling ears, for Bywater was not making his complaint in private.

"Not quite, sir. Please to look at this."

Bywater had whipped the broken phial out of his pocket, and was handing the smaller piece towards the master. Mr. Pye looked at it curiously.

"As I was turning over my surplice, sir, in the vestry when I found it that day, I saw this bit of glass lying in the wet ink. I thought it belonged to a small ornamental phial which Gerald Yorke used to keep about that time in his pocket, full of ink; but I couldn't be sure. So I put the bit of glass in my pocket, thinking the phial would turn up some day if it did belong to it. And so it has. You can put the piece into it, sir, and see whether it fits."

Gerald Yorke left his place and joined Bywater before the headmaster. He looked white and haughty. "Is it to be borne, sir, that he should tell these lies of me?"

"Are they lies?" returned Mr. Pye, who was fitting the piece into the bottle.

"I have told no lies yet," said Bywater. "And I have not said for certain you did it. I say I think so."

"You never found that bottle upon the surplice! I don't believe it," foamed Gerald.

"I found the little piece of glass. I put it in my trousers pocket, wet with ink as it was, and here are the stains of ink still," added Bywater, turning out that receptacle for the benefit of Mr. Pye. "It was this same pair of trousers I had on that day."

"Bywater," said the master, "why did you not say at the time that you found the piece of glass?"

"Because, sir, the bit by itself would have told nothing. I thought I'd wait till the bottle itself turned up. Old Jenkins the bedesman found it a few days ago in the college burial-ground, pretty near to the college gates, just in the spot where it most likely would be, sir, if one came out of the college in a fright and dashed it over."

"Does this belong to you, Yorke?" inquired the master, scrutinizing that gentleman's countenance as he had previously scrutinized Bywater's.

Gerald Yorke took the phial in his hand and examined it. He knew perfectly well that it was his, but he was asking himself whether the school, apart from Bywater, could contradict him if he said it was not. He feared they might.

"I had a phial very much like this, sir," turning it over and over in his hand, apparently for the purpose of a critical inspection. "I am not sure that this is the same; I don't think it is. I lost mine, sir. Somebody stole it out of my pocket, I think."

"When did you lose it?" demanded Mr. Pye.

"About the time that the surplice got inked, sir—a day or two before it."

"Who is telling lies now?" cried bold Bywater. "He had the bottle that very day, sir, at his desk here in this schoolroom. The upper boys know he had it, and that he was using it.—Channing"—turning round and catching Tom's eye, the first he did catch—"you can bear witness that he was using it that morning."

"Don't call upon me," replied Tom stolidly. "I decline to interfere with Master Yorke, for or against."

"It is his bottle, and he had it that morning, and I say that I think he must have broken it over the surplice," persisted Bywater, with as much noise as he dared display in the presence of the master. "Otherwise, how should a piece out of the bottle be lying on the surplice?"

The master came to the conclusion that the facts were tolerably conclusive. He touched Yorke. "Speak the truth, boy," he said, with a tone that seemed to imply he rather doubted Gerald's strict adherence to truth at all times and seasons.

Gerald turned crusty. "I don't know anything about it, sir.—Won't I pommel you for this!" he concluded in an undertone to Bywater.

"Besides that, sir," went on Bywater, pushing Gerald aside with his elbow as if he were nobody, "Charles Channing, I say, saw something that led him to suspect Gerald Yorke. I am certain he did. I think it likely that he saw him fling the bottle away after doing the mischief. Yorke knows that I have given him more than one chance to get out of this. If he had only told me in confidence that it was he who did it, whether by accident or mischief, I'd have let it drop."

"Yorke," said the master, leaning his face forward and speaking in an undertone, "do you remember what I promised the boy who did this mischief—not for the feat itself, but for braving me when I ordered him to speak out and he would not?"

Yorke grew angry and desperate. "Let it be proved against me, sir, if you please, before you punish. I don't think even Bywater, rancorous as he is, can prove me guilty."

At this moment who should walk forward but Master Bill Simms, much to the astonishment of the headmaster and of the school in general. Since Master Simms's confession to the master touching the trick played on Charles Channing, he had not led the most agreeable of lives. Some of the boys treated him with silent contempt, some worried his life out of him, and all hated him. He could now enjoy a little bit of retaliation on one of them, at any rate.

"Please, sir, the day the surplice was inked I saw Gerald Yorke come out of the college just before afternoon service, and chuck a broken ink-bottle over into the burial-ground."

"You saw it!" exclaimed the master, while Gerald turned his livid face, his flashing eye on the young telltale.

"Yes, sir. I was in the cloisters, inside one of the niches, and saw it. Charley Channing was in the cloisters, too; but he didn't see me, and I don't think Master Yorke saw either of us."

"Why did you not tell this at the time?"

Master Bill Simms stood on his heels and stood on his toes, and pulled his lanky straw hair and rubbed his face ere he spoke. "I was afraid, sir. I knew Master Yorke would beat me."

"Cur!" ejaculated Gerald below his breath. The headmaster turned his eyes upon him.

"Yorke, I——"

A commotion at the door, and Mr. Pye stopped. There burst in a lady with a wide extent of crinoline, but that was not the worst of the bustle. Her cheeks were flushed, her hands lifted, her eyes wild; altogether she was in a state of the utmost excitement. Gerald stared with all his might, and the headmaster rose to receive her as she sailed down upon him. It was Lady Augusta Yorke.

CHAPTER LVII.

A GHOST AGAIN.

MINDS are constituted differently, as was exemplified in the case under our immediate notice. While one of Mr. Galloway's first thoughts on the receipt of Roland Yorke's letter was to rush round to Lady Augusta's with the news, half in an angry, half in a reproachful humour, Arthur Channing was deliberating how they could contrive to keep it from her. The one was actuated by an angry, the other by a generous spirit.

Mr. Galloway at length ate his long-delayed dinner that evening, and then put on his hat, and with Roland's letter to him safe in his pocket, went out again to call on Lady Augusta. It happened, however, that Lady Augusta was not at home.

She had gone to dine at Colonel Joliffe's, a family who lived some distance from Helstonleigh, necessitating an early departure from her home if she would be in time for their six-o'clock dinner. It had thus occurred that when the afternoon's post arrived Lady Augusta was in all the bustle and scuffle of dressing; and Lady Augusta was one of those who are, and must be, in a scuffle if they are going anywhere beyond common.

Martha was busy assisting, and the cook brought up two letters. "Both for my lady," she said, giving them into Martha's hand.

"I have no time for letters now," called out my lady. "Put them into my drawer, Martha."

Martha did as she was bid, and Lady Augusta departed. She returned home pretty late, and the letters remained in their receptacle untouched.

Of course to retire to rest late necessitated, with Lady Augusta Yorke, the rising late the subsequent morning. About eleven o'clock she descended to breakfast. A letter on the breakfast-table brought to her remembrance the letters of the previous night, and she sent Martha for them. Looking at their superscriptions, she perceived one of them to be from Roland, the other from Lord Carrick; and she laid them by her to be opened presently.

"Mr. Galloway called last night, my lady," observed Martha.

"Oh, did he ?" said Lady Augusta.

"He said he wanted to see your ladyship particularly. But I said you were gone to Colonel Joliffe's."

Barely had Lady Augusta tasted her coffee, the letters still lying unopened at her side, when William Yorke entered, having just left the cathedral.

"This is a terrible blow, Lady Augusta," he observed as he took a seat.

"What's a blow ?" returned Lady Augusta. "Will you take a cup of coffee, William ?"

"Have you not heard of it ?" he replied, declining the coffee by a gesture. "I thought it probable that you would have received news from Roland."

"A letter arrived from Roland last night," she said, drawing forward the letter in question. "What is the matter? Will there be bad news in it? What have you heard?"

Mr. Yorke entertained not the slightest doubt that the letter now before him must contain the same confession which had been conveyed to Arthur and to Mr. Galloway. He deemed it better that she should hear it from him than read it unprepared. He bent towards her, and spoke in a low tone of compassion.

"I fear that the letter does contain bad news—very bad news indeed. Ro——"

"Good heavens! what has happened to him?" she interrupted, falling into a fit of excitement, just as Roland himself might have done. "Is he ill? Has he got hurt? Has he got killed?"

"Now, pray calm yourself, Lady Augusta. Roland is well in health, and has sailed for Port Natal, under what he considers favourable auspices. He——"

"Then why in the world do you come terrifying me out of my wits with your tales, William Yorke?" she broke forth. "I declare you are no better than a child!"

"Nay, Lady Augusta, you terrified yourself, jumping to conclusions. Though Roland is safe and sound, there is still some very disagreeable news to be told concerning him. He has been making a confession of bad behaviour."

"Oh!" said Lady Augusta, in a tone which seemed to signify, "Is that all?" as if bad behaviour and Roland might have some affinity for each other. William Yorke bent his head nearer and dropped his voice lower.

"In that mysterious affair of the bank-note, when Arthur Channing was accused——"

"Well, well?" she hastily repeated—for he had made a slight pause—and a tone of dread, like a shadow of evil, might be detected in her accents.

"It was Roland who took the note."

Lady Augusta jumped up. She *would* not receive it. "It is not true, it cannot be true!" she reiterated. "How dare you so asperse him, William Yorke? Thoughtless as Roland is, he would not be guilty of dishonour."

"He has written the full particulars both to Arthur Channing and to Mr. Galloway," said Mr. Yorke calmly. "I have no doubt that letter to you also relates to it. He confesses that the clearing of Arthur was a great motive in taking him from Helstonleigh."

Lady Augusta seized the letter and tore it open. She was too agitated to read calmly, but she saw enough to convince her that Roland, and no other, had appropriated the money. This must have been the matter he had obscurely hinted at in one of his last conversations with her. The letter was concluded very much after Roland's own fashion.

"Now, mother, if you care that anything in the shape of honour should ever shine round me again, you'll go off straight to the college school and set Tom Channing right with it and with the masters. And if you don't, and I get drowned on my voyage, I'll not say but my ghost will come again and haunt everybody who has had to do with the injustice."

Ghosts were not agreeable topics to Lady Augusta, and she gave a shriek at the suggested thought. But that was as nothing compared with her anger. Honourable in the main—hot, hasty, impulsive, losing all judgment, all self-control, when these fits of excitement came upon her—it is more than probable that her own course would have been to fly to the college school, unprompted by Roland. A sense of justice was strong within her, and in setting Tom right she would not spare Roland, her own son though he was.

Before William Yorke knew what she was about, she had flown upstairs, and was down again with her things on. Before he could catch her up, she was across the Boundaries, entering the cloisters, and knocking at the door of the college school.

There she broke in upon that interesting investigation touching the inked surplice.

Bywater, who seemed to think she had arrived for the sole purpose of setting at rest the question of the phial's ownership, and not being troubled with any superfluous ideas of circumlocution, eagerly held out the pieces to her when she was yards from his desk. "Do you know this, Lady Augusta? Isn't it Gerald's?"

"Yes, it is Gerald's," replied she. "He took it out of my desk one day in the summer, though I told him not, and I never could get it back again.—Have you been denying that it was yours?" she sternly added to Gerald. "Bad luck to ye, then, for a false boy! You are going to take a leaf out of your brother Roland's pattern, are ye? Haven't I had enough of you bad boys on my hands, but there must something fresh come up about one or the other of ye every day that the sun rises ?—Mr. Pye, I have come by Roland's wish and by my own to set the young Channings right with the school. You took the seniorship from Tom, believing that it was his brother Arthur who robbed Mr. Galloway. Not but what I thought somebody else would have had that seniorship, ye know!"

In the present mood of Lady Augusta, had any one of her sons committed a murder she must have proclaimed it, though it had been to condemn him to condign punishment. She had not come to shield Roland, and she did not care in her anger how bad she made him out to be, or whether she did it in Irish or English. The headmaster could only look at her with astonishment. He also believed her visit must have reference to the matter in hand.

"It is true, Lady Augusta. But for the suspicion cast upon his brother, Channing would not have lost the seniorship," said the master, ignoring the hint touching himself.

"And all of ye"—turning round to face the wondering school—"have been ready to fling yer stones at Tom Channing, like the badly brought up boys that ye are! *I* have heard of it. And my two, Gerald and Tod, the worst of ye at the game!—You may look, Master Tod, but I'll be after giving ye a jacketing for yer pains.—Let me tell ye all that it was not Tom Channing's brother took the bank-note; it was *their* brother—Gerald's and Tod's! It was my ill-doing boy Roland who took it."

Nobody knew where to look. Some looked at her ladyship; some at the headmaster; some at the Reverend William Yorke, who stood pale and haughty; some at Gerald and Tod; some at Tom Channing. Tom did not appear to regard it as news; he seemed to have known it before: the excessive astonishment painted upon every other face was absent from his. But half the school did not understand Lady Augusta. None understood her fully.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said the headmaster. "I do not comprehend what it is that you are talking about."

"Not comprehend!" repeated her ladyship. "Don't I speak plain? My unhappy son Roland has confessed that it was he who stole the bank-note that so much fuss has been made about, and that Arthur Channing was taken up for.—You two may look and frown," nodding to Gerald and Tod, "but it was your own brother who was the thief. Arthur Channing was innocent. I'm sure I shan't look a Channing in the face for months to come! —Tell them about it in a straightforward way, William Yorke."

Mr. Yorke, thus called upon, stated in a few concise words the facts to the master. His tone was low, but the boys caught the sense—that Arthur was really innocent, and that poor Tom had been degraded for nothing. The master beckoned Tom forward.

"Did you know of this, Channing?"

"Yes, sir, since the letter came to my brother Arthur last night."

Lady Augusta rushed up impulsively to Tom. She seized his hands, she shook them heartily, she clasped his shoulders. Tom never afterwards was sure that she didn't kiss him. "Ye'll live to be an honour to your parents yet, Tom," she said, "when my boys are breaking my heart with wilfulness."

Tom's face flushed with pleasure, not so much at the words as at the yearning, repentant faces cast at him from all parts of the room. There was no mistaking that they were eager to offer reparation. Tom Channing innocent all this while! How should they make it up to him? He turned to resume his seat, but Huntley slipped out of the place he occupied as the school's head and would have pushed Tom into it. There was some slight commotion, and the master lifted his spectacles.

"Silence, there!—Huntley, what are you about? Keep your seat."

"No, sir," said Huntley, advancing a step forward. "I beg your pardon, sir, but the place is no longer mine. I never have counted it mine legally, and I will, with your permission, resign it to its rightful owner. The place is Channing's; I have only occupied it for him."

He quietly pushed Tom into it as he spoke; and the school, finding their tongues and ignoring the presence of the master and of Lady Augusta, sprang from their desks at one bound and seized upon Tom—any part of him—wishing him luck, asking him to be a good old fellow and forgive them. "Long live Tom Channing, the senior of Helstonleigh School!" shouted bold Bywater; and the boys, thus encouraged, took up the shout, and the old walls echoed it—"Long live Tom Channing, the senior of Helstonleigh School!"

Before the noise had died away Lady Augusta was gone, and another had been added to the company in the person of Mr. Huntley. "Oh," he said, taking in a rapid glance of affairs, "I see it is all right. Knowing how thoughtless Harry is, I feared lest he might not recollect to do an act of justice. That he would be the first to do it if he remembered, I knew."

"As if I should forget that, sir!" responded Master Harry. "Why, I could no more live with Channing under me now than I'd let any of the others be above me. And I am not sorry," added the young gentleman, *sotto voce*. "If the seniorship is a great honour, it is also a great bother.—Here, Channing; take the keys."

He flung them across the desk as he spoke. He was proceeding to fling the roll and two or three other sundries which belong to the charge of the senior boy, but was stopped by the headmaster.

"Softly, Huntley! I don't know that I can allow this wholesale changing of places and functions."

"Oh yes, you can, sir," said Harry, with a bright look. "If I committed any unworthy act, I should be degraded from the seniorship and another appointed. The same thing can be done now, without the degradation."

"He deserves a recompense," said Mr. Huntley to the master. "But this will be no recompense; it is Channing's due. He will make you a better senior than Harry, Mr. Pye. And now," added Mr. Huntley, improving upon the whole, "there will be no necessity to divide the seniorship from the Oxford exhibition."

It was rather a free mode of dealing with the master's proper privileges, and Mr. Pye relaxed into a smile. In good truth, his sense of justice had been inwardly burning and flaring, set alight by the communication of Lady Augusta. Tom, putting aside a little outburst or two of passion, had behaved admirably throughout the whole season of opprobrium; there was no denying it.

"Will you do your duty as senior, Channing?" superfluously asked the master.

"I will try, sir."

"Take your place, then."

Mr. Huntley was the first to shake his hand when he was in it. "I told you to bear up bravely, my boy. I told you better days might be in store. Continue to do your duty in single-hearted honesty, under God, as I truly believe you are ever seeking to do, and you may well leave things in His hands. God bless you, Tom!"

Tom was a little overcome. But Master Bywater made a divertisement. He seized the roll, with which it was no business of his to meddle, and carried it to Mr. Pye. "The names have got to be altered, sir." In return for which Mr. Pye sternly motioned him to his seat, and Bywater favoured the school with a few winks as he lazily obeyed.

"Who could possibly have suspected Roland Yorke!" exclaimed the master, talking in an undertone with Mr. Huntley.

"Nay, if you come to compare merits, he was a far more likely subject for suspicion than Arthur," was Mr. Huntley's reply.

"He was, taking them comparatively. What I meant to imply was, that one could not have suspected that Roland, knowing himself guilty, would suffer another to lie under the stigma. Roland has his honourable points—if that may be said of one who helps himself to bank-notes," concluded the master.

"Ay, he is not all bad. Witness the sending back the money to Galloway; witness his persistent championship of Arthur; and the now going away partly to clear him, as he no doubt has done! I was as sure from the first that Arthur Channing was not guilty as that the sun shines in the heavens."

"Did you suspect Roland?"

"No. I had a peculiar theory of my own upon the matter," said Mr. Huntley, smiling, and apparently examining closely the grain of the master's desk—"a theory, however, which has proved to be worthless, as so many theories which obtain favour in this world often are. But I will no longer detain you, Mr. Pye. You must have had enough hindrance from your legitimate business for one morning."

"The hindrance is not at an end yet," was the master's reply as he shook hands with Mr. Huntley. "I cannot think what has possessed the school latterly: we are always having some unpleasant business or other to upset it."

Mr. Huntley went out, nodding cordially to Tom as he passed his desk; and the master turned his eyes and his attention on Gerald Yorke.

Lady Augusta had hastened from the college school as impetuously as she had hastened into it. Her errand now was to the Channings. She was eager to show them her grieved astonishment, her vexation—to make herself the *amende* for Roland so far as she could. She found both Mr. and Mrs. Channing at home. The former had purposed being in Guild Street early that morning, but so many visitors had flocked in to offer their congratulations that he had hitherto been unable to get away. Constance also was at home. Lady Augusta had insisted upon it that she should not come to the children on that the first day after her father and mother's return. They were alone when Lady Augusta entered.

Lady Augusta's first movement was to fling herself into a chair and burst out crying. "What am I to say to you?" she exclaimed. "What apology can I urge for my unhappy boy?"

"Nay, dear Lady Augusta, do not let it thus distress you," said Mr. Channing. "You are no more to be held responsible for what Roland has done than we were for Arthur when he was deemed guilty."

"Oh, I don't know" she sobbed. "Perhaps if I had been more strict with him always, he would never have done it. I wish I had made a point of giving them a whipping every night, all round, from the time they were two years old!" she continued emphatically. "Would that have made my children turn out better, do you think?"

Mrs. Channing could not forbear a smile. "It is not exactly *strictness* that answers with children, Lady Augusta."

"Goodness me! I don't know what does answer with them, then! I have been indulgent enough to mine, as everybody else knows, and look how they are turning out! Roland to go and take a bank-note! And as if that was not bad enough, to let the odium rest upon Arthur! You will never forgive him! I am certain that you never can or will forgive him! And you and all the town will visit it upon me!"

When Lady Augusta got into this humour of tearful complaint it was better to let it run its course, as Mr. and Mrs. Channing knew by past experience. They both soothed her, telling her that no irreparable wrong had been done to Arthur—nothing but what would be now made right.

"It all turns contrary together!" exclaimed my lady, drying up her tears over the first grievance, and beginning upon another. "I suppose, Constance, you and William Yorke will be making it up now."

Constance's smile of self-consciousness and her drooping eyelids might have told without words that that was already done.

"And the next thing, of course, will be your getting married!" continued Lady Augusta. "When is it to be? I suppose you have been settling the time."

The question was a direct and pointed one, and Lady Augusta waited for an answer. Mrs. Channing came to the relief of Constance.

"It would have been very soon indeed, Lady Augusta, but for this dreadful uncertainty respecting Charles. In any case, it will not be delayed beyond early spring."

"Oh, to be sure! I knew that! Everything goes contrary and cross for me! What am I to do for a governess? I might pay a thousand a year and not find one like Constance.—They are beginning to improve under you; they are growing more dutiful girls to me; and now it will all be undone again, and they'll just be ruined!"

Constance looked up with her pretty, timid blush. "William and I have been thinking, Lady Augusta, that if you approved, they had better come for a few months to Hazeldon House. I should then have them constantly under my own eye, and I think I could effect some good. We had used to speak of this in the summer, and last night we spoke of it again."

Lady Augusta flew into an ecstasy as great as her late grief had been. "Oh, it would be delightful!" she exclaimed. "Such a relief to me! And I know it would be the making of them. I shall thank you and William for ever, Constance; and I don't care what I pay you. I'd go without shoes to pay you liberally."

Constance laughed. "As to pay," she said, "I shall have nothing to do with that on my own score when once I am at Hazeldon. Those things will lie in William's department, not in mine. I question if he will allow you to pay him anything, Lady Augusta. We did not think of it for profit, but in the hope that it might benefit Caroline and Fanny."

Lady Augusta turned impulsively to Mrs. Channing. "What good children God has given you!"

The tears rushed into Mrs. Channing's eyes; she felt the remark in all its grateful truth. She was spared a reply—she did not like to contrast them with Lady Augusta's, ever so tacitly, and say they were indeed good—for Sarah entered, and said another visitor was waiting in the drawing-room.

As Mr. Channing withdrew, Lady Augusta rose to depart. She took Mrs. Channing's hand. "How dreadful for you to come home and find one of your children gone!" she uttered. "How can you bear it and be calm?"

Emotion rose then, and Mrs. Channing had a battle to keep it down. "The same God who gave me my children has taught me how to bear," she presently said. "For the moment yesterday I really was overwhelmed; but it passed away after a few hours' struggle. When I left home, I humbly committed my child to God's good care in implicit trust; and I feel that, whether dead or alive, that care is still over him."

"I wish to goodness one could learn to feel as you do!" uttered Lady Augusta. "Troubles don't seem to touch you and Mr. Channing: you rise superior to them; but they turn me inside out. And now I must go. And I wish Roland had never been born before he had behaved so! You must try and forgive him, Mrs. Channing. You must promise to try and welcome him should he ever come back."

"Oh yes," Mrs. Channing answered, with a bright smile. "The one will be as easy as the other has been. He is already forgiven, Lady Augusta."

"I have done what I could in it. I have been to the college school and told them all, and Tom is put into his place as senior. It's true, indeed; and I hope every boy will be flogged for putting upon him, and Gerald and Tod amongst the rest. And now, good-bye."

Sarah was holding open the street door for Lady Augusta. Lady Augusta, who generally gave a free word of gossip to everybody, like Roland, had her head turned to the girl as she passed out of it, and thereby nearly fell over a boy who at the moment was seeking to enter, being led by a woman, as if he had no strength to walk alone—a tall, thin, white-faced boy, with great eyes and no hair, and a red handkerchief tied over his head to hide the deficiency; but a beautiful featured boy, in spite of the defects, for he bore a strange resemblance to Charles Channing.

Was it Charles, or was it his shadow? My lady turned back to the hall, startling the house with her shrieks and cries that Charley's ghost had come, and bringing forth its inmates in alarmed consternation.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BYWATER'S DANCE.

NOT Charley's shadow, not Charley's ghost, but Charley himself, in real flesh and blood. One knew him, if the rest did not, and that was Judith. She seized upon him with sobs and cries, and sat down on the hall bench and hugged him to her. But Charley had seen some one else, and he slipped from Judith to the arms that were held out to shelter him, his warm tears breaking forth. "Mamma! mamma!"

Mrs. Channing's tears fell fast as she received him. She strained him to her bosom, and held him there; and they had to hold *her*, for her emotion was great. It is of no use trying to depict this sort of meeting. When the loved who have been deemed dead are restored to life, all description must fall short, if not utterly fail. Charley, whom they had mourned as lost, was with them again. Traces of sickness, of suffering, were in his face, in his attenuate form; but still he was in life. You must imagine what it was: Mr. and Mrs. Channing, Lady Augusta, Constance, the servants, and the Bishop of Helstonleigh—for no less a personage than that distinguished prelate had been the visitor to Mr. Channing, come to congratulate him on his cure and his return.

The woman who had accompanied Charley stood apart—a hard-featured woman, in a clean cotton gown, and clean brown apron, whose face proclaimed that she lived much in the open air. Perhaps she lived so much in it as to disdain bonnets, for she wore none, a red cotton handkerchief, the fellow to the one on Charley's head, being pinned over her white calico cap in lieu of one.

Many unexpected meetings take place in this life. A casual acquaintance whom we have met years ago, but whom we never expected to see again, may come across our path to-morrow. You, my reader, did not, I am sure, think to meet that woman again, whom you saw hanging up linen in a boat, as it glided by under the old cathedral walls under the noses of Bywater and a few more of his tribe the morning they were throwing away those unlucky keys, which they fondly deemed were never to be fished up again. But here is that very woman before you now, come to pay these pages as unexpected a visit as the keys paid to the college boys—not more unlooked for and not more strange than some of our meetings in actual life.

"Mamma, I have been ill. I have been nearly dying; and she has nursed me through it, and been kind to me."

Mrs. Channing leaned forward and grasped the woman's hand, gratitude shining from her wet eyes. Mr. Channing and Judith had a fight which should grasp the other. Lady Augusta laid hold of her behind, Sarah assailed her in front. There appeared to be no room left for Constance and the bishop, or they might have assisted at the demonstration, as the French say.

It was soon explained. That same barge had been passing downstream again that night when Charley fell into the water. The man heard the splash, called to his horse to stop, leaped overboard, and saved him. A poor little boy with a wound in his head, totally senseless, it proved to be when they had got him on board, and laid him on the bench for inspection. Meanwhile the docile horse went on of its own accord, and before the knotty question was decided of whether the man should bring to, get him on shore, and try and discover to whom he belonged, the barge was clear of the town, for the current was strong; it had been nearly clear of it when it passed the cathedral wall and the splash occurred. The man thought it as well that it was so; his voyage, this journey, was being made against time, and he dared not linger. Had Diggs the boathouse keeper's mother not put her head underneath the bedclothes and kept it there, she might have heard the sounds of the rescue.

So they kept Charley on board. He had evidently struck his head against something which had caused the wound and stunned him. It may have been—it is just possible that it may have been—against the projecting wall of the boathouse as he turned the corner in his fright and hurry. If so, that, no doubt, caused his fall and his stumble into the water. The woman—she had children of her own (that great girl whom you saw scraping potatoes was one, and she had two others younger)—washed the wound, and tried to bring Charley round. But she could not awaken him to full consciousness. His mind appeared to be wandering, and ere another day had passed he was in strong delirium. Whether it was the blow, whether it was the terrible fright which had preceded it, or—and this was most probable—both combined, Charles Channing was attacked with brain fever. The woman nursed him through it, and she applied her own simple remedies. She cut off his hair, and kept wet linen constantly on his head, and hot bricks, wrapped round with wet steaming flannel, to his feet, and gave him certain herb tea to drink, which, in her firm belief, her own experience, had never yet failed to subdue fever. Perhaps Charley did as well without a doctor as he would have done with one. By the time they reached their destination the malady was subsiding; but the young patient was so entirely prostrated and weak that all he could do was to lie quite still, scarcely opening his eyes, scarcely moving his hands.

When he became able to talk, they were beginning to move upstream again, as the woman called it. Charley told her all about himself, about his home, his dear mamma and Judith, his papa's ill-health and hopes of restoration, his college schoolboy life. It was delicious to lie there in the languor of returning health, and talk of these things. The kind woman won his love and confidence; but when she asked him how he came to fall into the river, he could never remember. In the social atmosphere of companionship, in the cheery sunlight, Charley could look back on the "ghost" in the cloisters and draw his own deductions. His good sense told him it was no ghost, that it was all a trick of Bywater's and others of the college boys. The woman's opinion was that, if they did do such a thing to frighten him, they ought to be whipped; but she was inclined to view it as a delusion of Charley's imagination, a relic left by the fever.

"Your folks 'll be fine and pleased to see you again, dear," she would say to him. "My master 'll moor the barge to the side when we gets to the place, and I'll take ye home to 'um."

How Charley longed for it he alone could tell, pleasant as it was, now he was better, to lie on deck, on a rude bed made of sacks, and glide peacefully along on the calm river, between the green banks, the blue sky above, the warm sun shining on him. Had Charley been placed on that barge in health, he would have thought it the nastiest place he had ever seen—confined, dirty, monotonous. But waking to it from the fever, when he did not care where he lay, so that he could lie, he grew reconciled to its inconveniences before he knew that they were inconveniences, like a young child grows up amidst many disagreeables and perceives them not. Indeed, Charley began to like the boat, but he was none the less eager for the day that would see him leave it.

That day came at last. The barge was brought to, and here you see Charley and his good protector. Charley's clothes looked a mile too small for him, he had so grown in his illness; and Charley was *minus* a cap, and the handkerchief did duty for one. But it was Charley, in spite of all; and I say that you must imagine the meeting. You must imagine their heartfelt thanks to the woman, and their more substantial recompense.

"Charley, darling, if you could but have written to us, what dreadful distress you would have saved!" exclaimed Constance.

"He write, miss!" interposed the woman. "He couldn't have writ to save his life! And we was a-moving upstream again before he was well enough to tell us anything about himself. My husband might have writ a word else; I ain't no hand at a pen myself. We have got quite used to the little gentleman, and shall miss him now."

"Constance, tell her. Is it not true about the ghost? I am sure you must have heard of it from the boys. She thinks I dreamt it, she says."

Judith broke out volubly before Constance could answer, testifying that it was true, and relating the ill doings of the boys that night rather more at length than she need have done. She and the woman appeared to be at perfect accord respecting the meed of punishment merited by those gentlemen.

The bishop leaned over Charley. "You hear what a foolish trick it was," he said. "Were I you, I would be upon good terms with such ghosts in future. There are no other sorts of ghosts, my boy."

"I know there are not," answered Charles. "Indeed, my lord, I do know there are not," he repeated more earnestly. "And I knew it then; only, somehow I got frightened. I will try and learn to be as brave in the dark as in the light."

"That's my sensible boy!" said the bishop. "For my part, Charley, I rather like being in the dark. God seems all the nearer to me."

The woman was preparing to go, declining all offers that she should rest and take refreshment. "Our turn both down and up was hurried this time," she explained, "and

I mayna keep the barge and my master a-waiting. I'll make bold, when we are past the town again, to step ashore and see how the young gentleman gets on."

Charley clung to her. "You shall not go till you promise to stay a whole day with us!" he cried. "And you must bring the children for mamma to see. She will be glad."

The woman laughed. "A whole day! a whole day's pleasure wasna for the likes of them," she answered; "but she'd try and spare a bit longer to stop nor she could spare now."

With many kisses to Charles, with many shakings of hands from all, she took her departure. The Bishop of Helstonleigh, high and dignified prelate that he was, and she a poor, hard-working barge-woman, took her hand into his, and shook it as heartily as the rest. Mr. Channing went out with her. He was going to say a word of gratitude to the man. The bishop also went out, but he turned the other way.

As he was entering Close Street the bishop encountered Arthur. The latter raised his hat and was passing onwards but the bishop arrested him.

"Channing, I have just heard some news from your father—that you are at length cleared from that charge, that you have been innocent all this while."

Arthur's lips parted with a smile. "Your lordship may be sure that I am very thankful to be cleared at last, though I am sorry that it should be at the expense of my friend Yorke."

"Knowing yourself innocent, you might have proclaimed it more decisively. What could have been your motive for not doing so?"

The ingenuous flush flew into Arthur's cheek. "The truth is, my lord, I suspected some one else. Not Roland Yorke," he pointedly added. "But—it was one against whom I should have been sorry to bring a charge. And so—and so I went on, bearing the blame."

"Well, Channing, I must say, and I shall say to others, that you have behaved admirably, showing a true Christian spirit. Mr. Channing may well be happy in his children. What will you give me," added the bishop, releasing Arthur's hand, which he had taken, and relapsing into his free, pleasant manner, "for some news that I can impart to you?"

Arthur wondered much. What news could the bishop have to impart which concerned him ?

"The little lost wanderer has come home."

"Not Charles !" uttered Arthur, startled to emotion. "Charles ! and not dead ?"

"Not dead, certainly," smiled the bishop, "considering that he can talk and walk. He will want some nursing though. Good-bye, Channing. This, take it for all in all, must be a day of congratulation for you and yours."

To leap into Mr. Galloway's with the tidings, to make but a few bounds thence home, did not take many minutes for Arthur. He found Charles in danger of being kissed to death—Mrs. Channing, Lady Augusta, Constance, and Judith, each taking her turn. I fear Arthur only made another.

"Why, Charley, you have grown out of your clothes !" he exclaimed. "How thin and white you are !"

The remarks did not please Judith. "Thin and white !" she resentfully repeated. "Did you expect him to come home as red and fat as a turkey-cock, and him just brought to the edge of the grave with brain fever ? One would think, Master Arthur, that you'd rejoice to see him if he had come back a skeleton, with his bones rattling, when it had seemed too likely you'd never see him at all. And what if he have outgrowed his clothes ? They can be let out, or replaced with new uns. I have got hands, and there's tailors in the place, I hope"

The more delighted felt Judith, the more ready was she to take up words and convert them into uncalled-for grievances. Arthur knew her, and only laughed. A day of rejoicing, indeed, as the bishop had said—a day of praise to God !

Charley had been whispering to his mamma. He wanted to go to the college schoolroom and surprise it. He was longing for a sight of his old companions. That happy moment had been pictured in his thoughts fifty times as he lay in the boat ; it was almost as much desired as the going home. Charley bore no malice, and he was prepared to laugh with them at the ghost.

"You do not appear strong enough to walk even so far as that," said Mrs. Channing.

"Dear mamma, let me go ! I could walk it for that if it were twice as far."

"Yes, let him go," interposed Arthur, who divined the feeling. "I will help him along."

Charley's trencher—the very trencher found on the banks—was brought forth, and he started with Arthur.

"Mind you bring him back safe this time!" called out Judy, in a tone of command, as she stood at the door to watch them along the Boundaries.

"Arthur," said the boy, "were they punished for playing me that ghost trick?"

"They have not been punished yet; they are to be. The master waited to see how things would turn out."

You may remember that Diggs, the boathouse keeper, when he took news of Charles's supposed fate to the college school, entered it just in time to interrupt an important ceremony, which was about to be performed on the back of Pierce senior. In like manner—and the coincidence was somewhat remarkable—Charles himself now entered it when that same ceremony was just brought to a conclusion, only that the back, instead of being Pierce senior's, was Gerald Yorke's. Terrible disgrace for a senior! and Gerald wished Bywater's surplice had been at the bottom of the river before he had meddled with it. He had not done it purposely. He had fallen in the vestry, the ink-bottle in his hand, which had broken and spilt its contents over the surplice. In an unlucky moment Gerald had determined to deny all knowledge of the accident, never supposing it would be brought home to him.

Sullen, angry, and resentful, he was taking his seat again, and the headmaster, rather red and hot with exertion, was locking up the great birch, when the door was opened, and Arthur Channing made his appearance, a boy, carrying the college cap, with him.

The school was struck dumb. The headmaster paused, birch in hand. But that he was taller and thinner, and that the bright colour and auburn curls were gone, they would have said at once it was Charley Channing.

The master let fall the birch and the lid of his desk. "*Channing!*" he uttered, as the child walked up to him. "Is it really you? What has become of you all this time? Where have you been?"

"I have been a long way in a barge, sir. The man saved me. And I have had brain fever."

He looked round for Tom; and Tom, in the wild exuberance of his delight, took Charley in his arms, and the tears dropped from his eyes on Charley's face as he kissed him as warmly as Judith could have done. And then brave

Tom could have eaten himself up alive, in mortification at having been so demonstrative in the sight of the college school.

But the school were not in the humour to be fastidious just then. Some of them felt more inward relief at the sight of Charles than they cared to tell; they had never experienced anything like it in their lives, and probably never would again. In the midst of the murmur of heartfelt delight that was arising, a most startling interruption occurred from Master Bywater. That gentleman sprang from his desk to the middle of the room, turned a somersault, and began dancing a hornpipe on his head.

"*Bywater!*" uttered the astounded master, "what's that for? Are you mad?"

Bywater finished his dance, and then brought himself to his feet. "I am so glad he has turned up all right, sir. I forgot you were in school."

"I should think you did," significantly returned the master. But Charles interrupted him.

"You will not punish them, sir, now I have come back safe?" he pleaded.

"But they deserve punishment," said the master.

"I know they have been sorry; Arthur says they have," urged Charley. "Please do not punish them now, sir; it is so pleasant to be back!"

"Will you promise never to be frightened at their foolish tricks again?" said the master. "Not that there is much danger of their playing you any: this has been too severe a lesson. I am surprised that a boy of your age, Charles, could allow himself to be scared by 'ghosts.' You do not suppose there are such things, surely?"

"No, sir; but somehow that night I got too frightened to think. You will forgive them, sir, won't you?"

"Yes! There! Go and shake hands with them," said Mr. Pye, relaxing from his dignity. "It is worth something, Charley, to see you back."

The school seemed to think so; and I wish you could have heard the shout that went up from it—the real, true, if somewhat noisy delight that greeted Charles. "Charley, we'll never dress up a ghost again! We'll never frighten you in any way!" they cried, pressing affectionately round him. "Only forgive us!"

"Why are you sitting in the senior's place, Tom?" asked Arthur.

"Because it is his own!" said Harry Huntley, with a broad smile of satisfaction. "Lady Augusta came in and set things right for you, and Tom is made senior of the school at last. Hurrah! Arthur cleared, Tom senior, Charley back, and Gerald flogged! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah! If Pye were worth a dump, he'd give us a holiday!" echoed bold Bywater.

CHAPTER LIX.

READY.

THE glorious surprise of Charley's safety greeted Hamish on his return home to dinner. In fact, he was just in time, having come somewhat before one o'clock, to witness Charley's arrival from the college schoolroom, escorted by the whole tribe, from the first to the last. Even Gerald Yorke made one, as did Master William Simms. Gerald, the smart over, deemed it best to put a light, careless, never-me-care face upon his punishment, disgraceful though it was considered to be for a senior. To give Gerald his due, his own share in the day's exploits faded into insignificance compared with the shock of mortification which shook him when he heard the avowal of his mother regarding Roland. He and Tod had been the most eager of all the school to cast the guilt of Arthur in Tom Channing's cheek; they had proclaimed it as particularly objectionable to their feelings that the robbery should have taken place in an office where their brother was a pupil; and now they found that Tom's brother had been entirely innocent, and that other brother, theirs, guilty! It was well that Gerald's brow should burn. "But she'd no cause to come here and blurt it out to the lot, right in one's face!" soliloquized Gerald, alluding to Lady Augusta. "They'd have heard it soon enough without that."

Master William Simms also attended Charles. Master William was hoping that the return of Charley would put him upon a better footing with the school. He need not have hoped it: his offence had been one that the college boys never forgave. Whether Charley returned dead or alive, or had never returned at all, Simms would always remain a sneak in their estimation. "Sneak Simms" he had been called since the occurrence; and he had come to the resolve in his own mind of writing word home to his friends that the studies in Helstonleigh college school were too hard for him, and asking to be removed to a private one. I think he would have to do so still.

Hamish lifted Charley to him with an eager, fond movement. The sight of him took a weight from his mind. Although really irresponsible for the disappearance of Charles, he had always felt that his father and mother might inwardly attach some blame to him—might deem him to have been wanting in care. Now, all was sunshine.

Dinner over, Mr. Channing walked with Hamish to the office. They were some time in getting there. Every other person they met stopped Mr. Channing to congratulate him. It seemed that the congratulations were never to end. It was not only the renewed health of Mr. Channing that people had to speak of : Helstonleigh, from one end to the other, was ringing with the news of Arthur's innocence ; and Charley's return was getting wind.

They reached Guild Street at last. Mr. Channing entered and shook hands with his clerks, and then took his own place in his private room. " Where are we to put you now, Hamish ? " he said, looking at his son with a smile. " There's no room for you.. You will not like taking your place with the clerks again."

" Perhaps I had better follow Roland Yorke's plan, and emigrate," replied Hamish demurely.

" I wish Mr. Huntley—— By the way, Hamish, it would only be a mark of courtesy if you stepped as far as Mr. Huntley's and told him of Charles's return," broke off Mr. Channing, the idea occurring to him with Mr. Huntley's name. " None have evinced more sympathy than he, and he will be rejoiced to hear that the child is safe."

" I'll go at once," said Hamish. Nothing loath was he, on his own part, to pay a visit at Mr. Huntley's.

Hamish overtook Mr. Huntley close at his own home. He was returning from the town. Had he been home earlier he would have heard the news from Harry. But Harry had now had his dinner and was gone again. He did not dine at the late table.

" I have brought you some news, sir," said Hamish, as they entered together.

" News again ! It cannot be very great, by the side of what we were favoured with last night from Mr. Roland," was the remark of Mr. Huntley.

"But indeed it is—greater news than even that. We have found Charley, Mr. Huntley."

Mr. Huntley sprang from the chair he was taking. "Found Charley! Have you really? Where was he? Hamish, I see by your countenance that the tidings are good. He must be alive."

"He is alive and well—at least well, comparatively speaking. A barge was passing down the river at the time he fell in, and a man leaped overboard and saved him. Charley has been in the barge ever since, and has had brain fever."

"And how did he come home?" wondered Mr. Huntley, when he had sufficiently digested the news.

"The barge brought him back. It is on its way up again. Charley arrived under convoy of the barge-woman, a red handkerchief on his head in lieu of his trencher, which, you know, he lost that night," added Hamish, laughing. "Lady Augusta, who was going out of the house as he entered, was frightened into the belief that it was his ghost, and startled them all with her cries to that effect, including the bishop, who was with my father in the drawing-room."

"Hamish, it is like a romance!" said Mr. Huntley.

"Very nearly, taking one circumstance with another—my father's return, cured; Roland's letter; and now Charley's resuscitation. Their all happening together renders it the more remarkable. Poor Charley does look as much like a ghost as anything, and his curls are gone. They had to cut his hair close in the fever."

Mr. Huntley paused. "Do you know, Hamish," he presently said, "I begin to think we were all a set of muffs. We might have thought of a barge."

"If we had thought of a barge we should never have thought the barge would carry him off," dissented Hamish. "However, we have got him back, and I thank God. I always said he would turn up, you know."

"I must come and see him," said Mr. Huntley. "I was at the college school this morning, therefore close to your house, but I did not call. I thought your father would have enough callers without me."

Hamish laughed. "He has had a great many. The house, I understand, has been like a fair. He is in Guild Street this afternoon. It looks like the happy old times to see him at his post again."

"What are you going to do, now your place is usurped?" asked Mr. Huntley. "Subside into a clerk again, and discharge the one who was taken on in your stead when you were promoted?"

"That's the question—what is to be done with me?" returned Hamish, in his joking manner. "I have been telling my father that I had perhaps better pay Port Natal a visit, and join Roland Yorke."

"I told your father once that when this time came I would help you to a post."

"I am aware you did, sir. But you told me subsequently you had altered your intention—that I was not eligible for it."

"Believing you were the culprit at Galloway's."

Hamish raised his eyebrows. "The extraordinary part of that, sir, is how you could have imagined such a thing of me."

"Hamish, I shall always think so myself in future. But I have this justification—that I was not alone. Some of your family, who might be supposed to know you better than I, entertained the same belief."

"Yes, Constance and Arthur. But are you sure, sir, that it was not their conduct that first induced you to suspect me?"

"Right, lad. Their conduct—I should rather say their manner—was inexplicably mysterious, and it set me on to ferret out the cause. That they were screening some one was evident, and I could only come to the conclusion that it was you. But, Mr. Hamish, there were circumstances on your own part which tended to bear out the belief," added Mr. Huntley, his tone becoming jocular. "Whence sprang that money wherewith you satisfied some of your troublesome creditors just at that same time?"

Once more, as when it was spoken of before, a red flush dyed the face of Hamish. Certainly, it could not be a flush of guilt, while that ingenuous smile hovered on his lips. But Hamish seemed attacked with sudden shyness.

"Your refusal to satisfy me on this point, when we previously spoke of it, tended to confirm my suspicions," continued Mr. Huntley. "I think you might make a confidant of me, Hamish. The money could not have dropped from the clouds, and I am sure you possessed no funds of your own just then."

"But neither did I steal it. Mr. Huntley"—raising his eyes to that gentleman's face—" how closely you must have watched me and my affairs ! "

Mr. Huntley drew in his lips. " Perhaps I had my own motives for doing so, young sir."

" I earned the money," said Hamish, who probably penetrated into Mr. Huntley's " motives ; " at any rate, he hoped he did. " I earned it fairly and honourably by my own private industry."

Mr. Huntley opened his eyes. " Private industry ! Have you turned shoemaker ? "

" Not shoemaker," laughed Hamish — " bookmaker. The truth is, Mr. Huntley—— But will you promise to keep my secret ? "

" Ay. Honour bright."

" I don't want it to be known just yet. The truth is, I have been doing some literary work. Martin Pope got me an introduction to one of the London editors, and I furnished some papers. They were approved of and inserted ; but for the first I got no pay. I threatened to strike, and then payment was promised. The first instalment which came I chiefly used to *stop* my debts ; the second and third to liquidate them. That's where the money came from."

Mr. Huntley stared at Hamish as if he could scarcely take in the news. It was, however, only the simple truth. When Martin Pope paid a visit to Hamish one summer night, frightening Hamish ; frightening Arthur, who dreaded it might be a less inoffensive visitor ; frightening Constance, for the matter of that, for she heard more of their dread than was expedient—his errand was to tell Hamish that he was to be paid for his papers in future, that payment was to commence forthwith. You may remember the evening, though it is long ago. You may also remember Martin Pope's coming hurriedly into the office in Guild Street, telling Hamish somebody was starting by the train, when both hastened to the station, leaving Arthur in wonder. That was the very London editor himself. He had been on a country tour, and was taking Helstonleigh on his way back ; had stayed in it a day or two for the purpose of seeing Martin Pope, who was an old friend, and of being introduced to Hamish Channing. That shy feeling of reticence, which is the characteristic of most persons whose genius is worth anything, had induced Hamish to bury all this in silence.

" But when have you found time to write ? " exclaimed

Mr. Huntley, who could not get over the surprise. "You could not find it during office hours?"

"Certainly not. I have written in the evening and at night. I have been a great rake, stopping up later than I ought, over this writing."

"Do they know of it at home?"

"Some of them know that I sit up; but they don't know what I sit up for. By way of a blind—I suppose it may be called a justifiable deceit," said Hamish gaily—"I have taken care to carry the office books into my room, that their suspicions may be confined to the accounts. Judy's keen eyes detected my candle burning later than she considered it ought to burn, and her rest has been disturbed with visions of my setting the house on fire. I have counselled her to keep the water-butt full under her window, so that she may be safe."

"And are you getting money now?"

"In one sense I am: I am writing for it. My former papers were mostly disjointed ones—essays, and the like; but I am about a longer work now, to be paid for on completion. When it is finished and appears, I shall startle them at home with the news, and treat them to a sight of it. When all other trades fail, sir, I can set up my staff as author."

Mr. Huntley's feelings glowed within him. None more than he knew the value of silent industry—the worth of those who patiently exercise it. His heart went out to Hamish. "I suppose I must recommend you to Bartlett's post after all," said he, affecting to speak carelessly, his eye betraying something very different.

"Is it not gone?" asked Hamish.

"No, it is not gone. And the appointment rests with me. How would you like it?"

"Nay," said Hamish, half mockingly; "the question is, Should I be honest enough for it?"

Mr. Huntley shook his fist at him. "If you ever bring that reproach up again, I'll—I'll—— You had better keep friends with me, you know, sir, on other scores."

Hamish laughed. "I should like the post very much indeed, sir."

"And the house also, I suppose, you would make no objection to?" nodded Mr. Huntley.

"None in the world. I must work away, though, if it is ever to get furnished."

"How can you tell but some benevolent spirit might furnish it for you?" cried Mr. Huntley quaintly.

They were interrupted before anything more was said.. Ellen, who had been out with her aunt, came running in, all excitement. "O papa! such happy news! Charles Channing is found! He——"

She stopped dead when she saw that she had another auditor. Hamish rose to greet her. He took her hand, released it, and then returned to the fire to Mr. Huntley. Ellen stood by the table; she had grown suddenly timid.

"You will soon be receiving a visit from my mother and Constance," observed Hamish, looking at her. "I heard certain arrangements discussed in which Miss Ellen Huntley's name bore a part. We are soon to lose Constance."

Ellen blushed rosy red. Mr. Huntley was the first to speak. "Yorke has come to his senses, I suppose?"

"Yorke and Constance between them have. In a short time she is to be transplanted to Hazeldon."

"It is more than he deserves," emphatically cried Mr. Huntley. "I suppose you will be for thinking of getting married next, Mr. Hamish, when you come into possession of that house we have been speaking of, and are your own master?"

"I always intended to think of it, sir, as soon as I could," returned saucy Hamish. And Ellen ran out of the room.

That same afternoon Arthur Channing was seated at the organ in pursuance of his duty, when a message came up from the dean. He was desired to change the anthem fixed upon, taken from the Thirty-fifth Psalm, for another, "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is!"

It was not an anthem in the printed collection of the cathedral, but one which had been recently composed, and presented to it by a private individual. It consisted of a treble solo and chorus. Why had the dean specially commanded it for that afternoon? It was very rare indeed that he changed the services after they were put up. Had he had *Arthur* in his mind when he fixed upon it? It was impossible to say. Be it as it would, the words found a strangely applicable echo in Arthur's heart as the sweet voice of Bywater rang through the cathedral.

"O taste and see how gracious the Lord is; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the Lord, ye that are His saints; for they that fear Him lack nothing. The lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; and His ears are open unto their prayers. Great are the troubles of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of all. The Lord delivereth the souls of His servants; and all they that put their trust in Him shall not be destitute."

Every word told upon Arthur's heart, sending it up in thankfulness to that great Lord, the Giver of all good.

He found the dean waiting for him in the nave when he went down at the conclusion of the service. Dr. Gardner was with him. The dean held out his hand to Arthur.

"I am very glad you are cleared," he said. "You have behaved nobly."

Arthur winced. He did not like to take the faintest meed of praise that was not his strict due. The dean might have thought he deserved less, did he know that he had been only screening Hamish; but Arthur could not avow that tale in public. He glanced at the dean with a frank smile.

"You see now, sir, that I only spoke the truth when I assured you of my innocence."

"I do see it," said the dean. "I believed you then." And once more shaking Arthur's hand, he turned into the cloisters with Dr. Gardner.

"I have already offered my congratulations," said the canon good-humouredly, nodding back to Arthur. Which was correct. He had waylaid Arthur as he went into college.

Arthur suffered them to go on a few steps, and then descended to the cloisters. Old Ketch was shuffling along.

"What's this as I've been a-hearing about that there drowned boy having come back?" asked he of Arthur, in his usual ungracious fashion.

"I don't know what you may have heard, Ketch. He is come back."

"And he ain't dead? nor drownded?"

"Neither one nor the other. He is alive and well."

Ketch gave a groan of despair. "And them horrid young wretches 'll escape the hangman! I'd ha' walked ten miles to see 'em——"

"Gracious, Sir John, what's that you are talking about?" interrupted Bywater, as the choristers trooped up. "Escaped you! So we have for once. What an agony of disappointment it must be for you, Mr. Calcraft! Such practice for your old hands to topple off a dozen or so of us! Besides the pay! How much do you charge a head, Calcraft?"

Ketch answered by a yell.

"Now don't excite yourself, I beg," went on aggravating Bywater. "We are thinking of getting up a petition to the dean, to console your disappointment, praying that he'll allow you to wear a cap that we have ordered for you! It's made of scarlet cloth, with long ears, and a set of drooping bells! Its device is a cross beam and a cord, and we wish you health to wear it out!—I say, let's wish Mr. Calcraft health!—What's the tripe a pound to-day, Calcraft?"

The choristers, in various stages of delight, entered on their aggravating shouts, on their mocking dance. When they had driven Mr. Ketch to the very verge of insanity, they decamped to the schoolroom.

I need not enlarge on the evening of thankfulness it was at Mr. Channing's. Not one but had special cause for gratitude—save, perhaps, Annabel: Mr. Channing restored to health and strength; Mrs. Channing's anxiety removed; Hamish secure in his new prospects—for Mr. Huntley had made them certain; heaviness removed from the heart of Constance; the cloud lifted from Arthur; Tom on the pedestal he thought he had lost, sure also of the Oxford exhibition; Charley amidst them again! They could trace the finger of God in all, and were fond of doing it.

Soon after tea Arthur rose. "I must drop in and see Jenkins," he observed. "He will have heard the items of news from twenty people, there's little doubt, but he will like me to go to him with particulars. No one in Helstonleigh has been more anxious that things should turn out happily than poor Jenkins."

"Tell him he has my best wishes for his recovery, Arthur," said Mr. Channing.

"I will tell him," replied Arthur. "But I fear all hope of recovery for Jenkins is past."

It was more decidedly past than even Arthur suspected when he spoke. A young woman was attending to Mrs. Jenkins's shop when Arthur passed through it. Her face was strange to him; but from a certain peculiarity in the eyes and mouth he inferred it to be Mrs. Jenkins's sister. In point of fact, that lady, finding that her care of Jenkins and her care of the shop rather clashed with each other, had sent for her sister from the country to attend temporarily on the latter. Lydia went up to Jenkins's sickroom, and said a gentleman was waiting; and Mrs. Jenkins came down.

"Oh, it's you," quoth she. "I hope he'll be at rest now. He has been bothering his mind over you all day. My opinion is he'd never have come to this state if he had taken things easy, like sensible people."

"Is he in his room?" inquired Arthur.

"He is in his room, and in his bed. And what's more, young Mr. Channing, he'll never get out of it alive."

"Then he is worse?"

"He has been worse this four days. And I only get him up now to have his bed made. I said to him yesterday, 'Jenkins, you may put on your things and go down to the office if you like.' 'My dear,' said he, 'I couldn't get up, much less get down to the office;' which I knew was the case before I spoke. I wish I had had my wits about me!" somewhat irascibly went on Mrs. Jenkins; "I should have had his bed brought down to the parlour here before he was so ill. I don't speak for the shop; I have got somebody to attend to that; but it's such a toil and a trapes up them two pair of stairs for every little thing that's wanted."

"I suppose I can go up, Mrs. Jenkins?"

"You can go up," returned she; "but mind you don't get worrying him. I won't have him worried. He worries himself, without anybody else doing it gratis. If it's not about one thing, it's about another. Sometimes it's his master and the office—how they'll get along; sometimes it's his old father. He don't need any foreign things to put him up."

"I am sorry he is so much worse," remarked Arthur.

"So am I," said Mrs. Jenkins tartly. "I have been a-doing all I could for him from the first, and it has been like working against hope. If care could have cured him, or money could have cured him, he'd be well now. I have got some trifling savings in the bank, young Mr. Channing, and I have not spared them. If they had ordered him medicine at a guinea a bottle I'd have got it for him; if they had said he must have wine, or delicacies brought from the other end of the earth, they should have been brought. Jenkins isn't good for much in point of spirit, as all the world knows; but he's my husband, and I have strove to do my duty by him. Now, if you want to go up, you can go," added she, after an imperceptible pause. "There's a light on the stairs, and you know his room. I'll take the opportunity to give an eye to the kitchen; I don't care to leave him by himself now. Finely it's going on, I know."

Mrs. Jenkins whisked down the kitchen stairs, and Arthur proceeded up. Jenkins was lying in bed, his head raised by pillows. Whatever may have been Mrs. Jenkins's faults of manner, her efficiency as a nurse and manager could not be called in question. A bright fire burnt in the well-ventilated though small room, the bed was snowy white, the apartment altogether thoroughly comfortable. But—Jenkins!

Fully occupied with his work for Mr. Galloway, it was several days since Arthur had called on Jenkins, and the change he now saw in his face struck him sharply. The skin was glazed and drawn, the eyes were unnaturally bright, the cheeks had fallen in; certainly there could not be very many hours of life left to Jenkins. A smile sat on his parched lips, and his eyelashes became moist as he looked up to Arthur and held out his feeble hand.

"I knew you would be cleared, sir! I knew that God would surely bring the right to light! I have been humbly thanking Him for you, sir, all day."

Arthur's eyes glistened also as he bent over him. "You have heard it then, Jenkins? I thought you would."

"Yes, sir; I heard it this morning, when it was getting towards midday. I had a visit, sir, from his lordship the bishop. I had indeed! He came up like he has done before—as kindly and with as little ceremony as if he had been a poor body like myself. It was he who first told me, Mr. Arthur."

"I am glad he came to see you, Jenkins."

"He talked so pleasantly, sir. 'It is a journey that we must all take, Jenkins,' he said; 'and, for my part, I think it matters little whether we take it sooner or later, so that God vouchsafes to us the grace to prepare for it.' For the affability, sir, it was just as if it had been a brother talking to me; but he said things different from what any poor brother of mine could have said, and they gave me comfort. Then he asked me if I had taken the sacrament lately; and I thanked him, and said I had taken it on Sunday last; our clergyman came round to me after service. Mr. Arthur"—and poor Jenkins's eyes wore an eager look of gratitude—"I feel sure that his lordship would have administered it to me with his own hands. I wonder whether all the bishops are like him!"

Arthur did not answer. Jenkins resumed, quitting the immediate topic for another.

"And I hear, sir, that Mr. Channing has come home restored, and that the little boy is found. His lordship was so good as to tell me both. O Mr. Arthur, how merciful God is!"

"We are finding Him so just now," fervently spoke Arthur.

"And it is all right again, sir, with you and Mr. Galloway?"

"Quite right. I am to remain in the office. I am to be in your place, Jenkins."

"You'll occupy a better position in it, sir, than I ever did. But you will not be all alone, surely?"

"Young Bartlett is coming to be under me. Mr. Galloway has made the final arrangements to-day. We shall go on all right now."

"Ay," said Jenkins, folding his thin hands upon the counterpane, and speaking as in self-commune, "we must live near to God to know His mercy. It does seem almost as if I had asked a favour of any earthly person, so exactly has it been granted me! Mr. Arthur, I prayed that I might live to see you put right with Mr. Galloway and the town, and I felt as sure as I could feel, by some internal evidence which I cannot describe, but which was plain to me, that God heard me and would grant my wish. It seems, sir, as if I had been let live for that. I shan't be long now."

"While there is life there is hope, you know, Jenkins," replied Arthur, unable to say anything more cheering in the face of circumstances.

"Mr. Arthur, the hope for me now is, to go," said Jenkins. "I would not be restored if I could. How can I tell, sir, but I might fall away from God! If the call comes to-night, sir, it will find me ready. O Mr. Arthur, if people did but know the peace of living close to God, of feeling that they are READY—ready for the summons, let it come in the second or third watch!"

"Jenkins!" exclaimed Arthur, as the thought struck him, "I have not heard you cough once since I came in! Is your cough better?"

"O sir, there's another blessing! Now that I am grown so weak that the cough would shatter me—tear my frame to pieces almost—it is gone! It is nearly a week, sir, since I coughed at all. My deathbed has been made quite a pleasant place for me. Except for the weakness, I am free from pain, and I have all things comfortable. I am rich in abundance: my wife waits upon me night and day—she lets me want for nothing; before I can express a wish it is done. When I think of all the favours showered down upon me, and how little I can do, or have ever done, for God in return, I am overwhelmed with shame."

"Jenkins, one would almost change places with you, to be in your frame of mind!" cried Arthur, his tone an impassioned one.

"God will send the same frame of mind to all who care to go to Him," was the reply. "Sir," and now Jenkins dropped his voice, "I was grieved to hear about Mr. Roland. I could not have thought it."

"Ay; it was unwelcome news, for his own sake."

"I never supposed but what the post-office must have been to blame. I think, Mr. Arthur, he must have done it in a dream—like one, I mean, who has not his full faculties about him. I hope the Earl of Carrick will take care of him. I hope he will live to come back a good, brave man. If he would only act less on impulse, and more on principle, it would be better for him. Little Master Charles has been ill, I hear, sir? I should like to see him."

"I will bring him to see you," replied Arthur.

"Will you, sir?" And Jenkins's face lighted up. "I should like just to set eyes on him once again. But—it must be very soon, Mr. Arthur."

"You think so?" murmured Arthur.

"I know it, sir—I feel it. I do not say it before my wife, sir, for I don't think she sees herself that I am so near the end, and it would only grieve her. It *will* grieve her, sir, whenever it comes, though she may not care to show to people that it does. I shall see you again, I hope, Mr. Arthur?"

"That you shall be sure to do. I will not miss a day now, but what I will come in. It will do me good to see you, Jenkins, to hear you tell again your happy state of resignation."

"It is better than resignation, Mr. Arthur; it is a state of hope. Not but what I shall leave some regrets behind me. My wife will be lone and comfortless, and must trust to her own exertions only. And my poor old father——"

"If I didn't know it! If I didn't know that, on some subject or other, he'd be safe to be worrying himself, or it would not be him! I'd put myself into my grave at once if

I were you, Jenkins. As good do it that way as by slow degrees."

Of course you cannot fail to recognize the voice. She came in at that unlucky moment when Jenkins was alluding to his father. He attempted a defence—an explanation.

"My dear, I was not worrying. I was only telling Mr. Arthur Channing that there were some things I should regret to leave. My poor old father for one. He has looked to me, naturally, to help him a little bit in his old age, and I would rather, so far as that goes, have been spared to do it. But neither that nor anything else can worry me now. I am content to leave all to God."

"Was ever the like heard?" retorted Mrs. Jenkins. "Not worrying! *I* know. If you were not worrying, you wouldn't be talking. Isn't old Jenkins your father, and shan't I take upon myself to see that he does not want? You know I shall, Jenkins. When do I ever go from my word?"

"My dear, I know you will do what's right," returned Jenkins, in his patient meekness; "but the old man will feel it hard my departing before him.—Are you going, sir?"

"I must go," replied Arthur, taking one of the thin hands. "I will bring Charley in to-morrow."

Jenkins pressed Arthur's hand between his. "God bless you, Mr. Arthur!" he fervently said; "may He be your friend for ever! May He render your dying bed happy, as He has rendered mine!" And Arthur turned away, never again to see Jenkins in life.

"Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching."

As Jenkins was, that night, when the message came for him.

CHAPTER LX.

IN WHAT DOES IT LIE?

HAD the clerk of the weather been favoured with an express letter containing a heavy bribe, a more lovely day could not have been secured than that one in January which witnessed the marriage of Constance Channing to the Reverend William Yorke.

The church ceremony was over, and they were home again, seated at breakfast with the invited guests. But few guests were present, and they mostly close friends—the Huntleys; Lady Augusta Yorke and Gerald; Mr. Galloway; and the Reverend Mr. Pye, who married them. It is the fashion in these days to have a superfluity of bridesmaids. I am not sure that a young lady would consider herself legally married unless she enjoyed the privilege. Constance, though not altogether a slave to fashion, had followed it, not in a very extensive degree. Annabel Channing and Ellen Huntley, Caroline and Fanny Yorke, had been the *demoiselles d'honneur*. Charley's auburn curls had grown on again, and Charley himself was in rather better condition than when he arrived from his impromptu excursion. For grandeur, nobody could match with Miss Huntley; her brocade silk stood on end, stiff, and prim, and stately as herself. Judy, in her way, was stately too, a curiously fine lace cap on her head, which had not been allowed to see the light since Charley's christening, with a big white satin bow in front of it twice as large as the cap itself. And that was no despicable size.

The only one who did not behave with a due regard to what might be expected of him was Hamish, grievous as it is to have to record it. It had been duly impressed upon Hamish that he was to conduct Miss Huntley in to breakfast, etiquette and society consigning that lady to his share. Mr. Hamish, however, chose to misconstrue instructions in the most deplorable manner. He left Miss Huntley a prey to whoever might pick her up, and took in Miss Ellen. It might have passed muster, possibly, but for Annabel's tongue, which appeared to be under no more stringent rule that important morning than it was at other times.

"Hamish, that's wrong! It is Miss Huntley you are to take in, not Ellen."

Hamish had grown suddenly deaf. He walked on with Ellen, leaving the confusion to right itself. Arthur stepped up in the dilemma, and the tips of Miss Huntley's white-gloved fingers were laid upon his arm. It would take her some time to forgive Hamish, favourite though he was. Later, Hamish took the opportunity of reading Miss Annabel a private lecture on the expediency of minding her own business.

Hamish was in his new post now at the bank, thoroughly well established. He had not yet taken up his abode in the house. It was too large, he laughingly said, for a single man.

The breakfast came to an end, as other breakfasts do; and next, Constance came down in her travelling dress. Now that the moment of parting was come, Constance, in her agitation, longed for it to be over. She hurriedly wished them adieu, and lifted her tearful face last to her father.

Mr. Channing laid his hands upon her. "May God bless my dear child, and be her guide and refuge for ever!—William Yorke, it is a treasure of great price that I have given you this day. May she be as good a wife as she has been a daughter!"

Mr. Yorke, murmuring a few heartfelt words, put Constance into the carriage, and they drove away.

"It will be your turn next," whispered Hamish to Ellen Huntley, who stood watching the departure from one of the windows.

What Ellen would have said—whether she would have given any other answer than that accorded by her blushing cheeks—cannot be told. The whisper had not been quite so low as Hamish deemed it, and it was overheard by Mr. Huntley.

"There may be two words to that bargain, Mr. Hamish."

"Twenty, if you like, sir," responded Hamish promptly, "so that they be affirmative ones."

"Ellen," whispered Mr. Huntley, "would you have him, with all his gracelessness?"

Ellen looked ready to drop, and her eyes filled. "Do not joke now, papa," was all she said.

Hamish caught her hand, and took upon himself the office of soothing her. And Mr. Huntley relapsed into a smile, and did not hinder him.

But somebody else was bursting into tears, as the sounds testified. It proved to be Lady Augusta Yorke. A few tears might well be excused to Mrs. Channing, on the occasion of parting with her ever-loving, ever-dutiful child, but what could Lady Augusta have to cry about?

Lady Augusta was excessively impulsive, as you have long ago learnt. The happiness of the Channing family in their social relations to each other, the loving gentleness of Mr. and Mrs. Channing with their children, the thorough respect, affection, duty, rendered to them by the children in return, had struck her more than ever on this morning. She was contrasting the young Channings with her boys and girls, and the contrast made her feel low-spirited. Thus she was just primed to go off when the parting came with

Constance, and the burst took place as she watched the carriage from the door. Had any one asked Lady Augusta why she cried, she would have been puzzled to state.

"Tell me," she suddenly uttered, turning and seizing Mrs. Channing's hands—"what makes the difference between your children and mine! My children were not born bad any more than yours were; and yet look at the trouble they give me! In what does it lie?"

"I think," said Mrs. Channing quietly, and with some hesitation—for it was not a pleasant thing to say what might tacitly reflect on the Lady Augusta—"that the difference in most children lies in the bringing up. Children turn out well or ill as they are trained; they will become our blessing or our grief."

"Ah, yes, that must be it," acquiesced Lady Augusta. "And yet—I don't know," she rejoined doubtingly. "Do you believe that so very much lies in the training?"

"It does indeed, Lady Augusta. God's laws everywhere proclaim it. Look at the productions of the earth. Dig out a rough diamond from a mine. What is it, unless you polish it, and cut it, and set it? Do you see its value, its beauty, in its native state? Look at the trees of our fields, the flowers of our parterres, the vegetables of our gardens. What are they, unless they are pruned, dug about, cared for? It is by cultivation alone that they can be brought to perfection. Compare those which have grown up in a wild, rude state with others that have been sedulously reared and tended; you can scarcely believe them to be of the same species. And if God made the productions of the earth so that it is only by our constant attention and labour they can be brought to perfection, would He, think you, have us evince less care for that far more important product, our children's minds? *They* may be trained to perfectness, or they may be let run to waste by neglect."

"Oh dear!" sighed Lady Augusta. "But it is a dreadful trouble always to be worrying over children."

"It is a trouble that, in a very short time after entering upon it, grows into a pleasure," said Mrs. Channing. "I am sure that there is not a single mother really training her children to good but will bear me out in the assertion. It is a pleasure that they would not be without. Take it from them, and the most delightful occupation of their lives is gone. And think of the reward! Were there no higher end to be looked for, it would be found in the loving obedient docility of the children. You talk of the trouble Lady Augusta: those who would escape trouble with thei children should be careful to train them."

"I think I'll begin at once with mine," exclaimed Lady Augusta, brightening up.

A smile crossed Mrs. Channing's lips as she slightly shook her head. None knew better than she that training, to bear its proper fruit, must be begun with a child's earliest years.

Meanwhile the proctor was holding a conference with Mr. Channing. "Presents seem to be the order of the day," he was remarking, in allusion to sundry pretty offerings which had been made to Constance. "I think I may as well contribute my mite——"

"Why, you have done it! You gave her a bracelet, you know," cried Miss Annabel. For which interruption she was forthwith consigned to a respectful distance, and ran away to be teased by Tom and Gerald.

"I have something in my pocket which I wish to give to Arthur, which I have been intending for some time to give him," resumed Mr. Galloway, taking from his pocket what seemed to be a roll of parchment.—"Will you accept them, Arthur?"

"What, sir?"

"Your articles."

"O Mr. Galloway——"

"No thanks, my boy. I am in your debt far deeper than I liked to be! A trifling thing like this"—touching the parchment—"cannot wipe out the suspicion I cast upon you, the disgrace which followed it. Perhaps at some future time I may be able to atone for it better. I hope we shall be together many years, Arthur. I have no son to succeed to my business, and it may be—but I will leave that until the future comes."

It was a valuable present gracefully offered, and Mr Channing and Arthur acknowledged it as such, passing ove the more valuable hint in silence.

"Children," said Mr. Channing, as the festivities of the day came to an end, and, the guests departed, they gathered together round their fireside, bereft of Constance, "what a forcible lesson of God's mercy ought these last few months to teach us! Six months ago there came to us the news that our suit was lost; other troubles followed upon it, and things looked dark. But I, for one, never lost my trust in God—it was not for a moment shaken; and, if you are the children I and your mother have striven to bring up, you did not lose yours. Tom"—turning suddenly upon him—"I fear you were the most impatient."

Tom looked contrite. "I fear I was, papa."

"What good did the indulgence in your hasty spirit do you?"

"No good, but harm," frankly confessed Tom. "I hope it has helped me to some notion of patience, though, for the future, papa."

"Ay," said Mr. Channing. "Hope on, strive on, work on, and trust on! I believe that you made these your watchwords, as did I. And now, in an almost unprecedentedly short time, we are brought through our troubles. While others, equally deserving, have to struggle for years before the cloud is lifted, it has pleased God to bring us out wonderfully quick, to heap mercies and blessings and a hopeful future upon us. I may truly say, 'He has brought us to great honour, and comforted us on every side.'"

"I HAVE BEEN YOUNG, AND NOW AM OLD; AND YET SAW I NEVER THE RIGHTEOUS FORSAKEN, NOR HIS SEED BEGGING THEIR BREAD."

THE END.

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35

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